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Gypsy Punk: Towards a New Immigrant Music

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2012

Declaration

I certify that this thesis is the result of my own investigations and, except for quotations, all of which have been clearly identified, was written entirely by me.

Alan Ashton-Smith

July 2012

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It is unlikely that I could have written this thesis anywhere except in the unique environment of the London Consortium, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of its PhD programme, and for the unwavering and wide-ranging interest and advice of its staff and students.

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Abstract

The musical genre of Gypsy Punk, in which the most significant contributions have been made by the multi-ethnic band Gogol Bordello, may appear to be simply a composite of the two elements that make up its name – ‘gypsy’ and ‘punk’. But a closer investigation reveals that Gogol Bordello are in fact engaging with a broader cultural palette, and challenged established perceptions. The figure of the ‘gypsy’ is important to the genre, but it is essential that the implications of this word are understood in order to fully grasp its significance. In addition to influences from punk and cabaret, the Balkans, and the ways in which this region has been perceived from outside, also have a bearing on Gypsy Punk. Yet none of the musicians who make up Gogol Bordello can be described as either ‘gypsy’ or Balkan, and therefore the outward presentation of the band does not reveal the significance of Gypsy Punk. This can be better understood through an examination of Gogol Bordello’s use of myth – a Gypsy Punk mythology is created not only through their music, but also through iconography, performance, and the band’s manifesto. In addition, extant myths, such as those that surround the Roma and the Balkans, are subverted in their work. However, it is the mythology of immigration that is in many ways most important to Gypsy Punk. The immigrant experiences of Gogol Bordello’s members, and the immigrant figures that appear in their work are particularly relevant in that they reflect contemporary global society. Gypsy Punk transcends the established idea of ‘gypsy’ music and functions as what I describe as an immigrant music. The mythologies that Gogol Bordello engage with serve as windows through which immigrant music can be seen and comprehended as a music with particular relevance today.

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INTRODUCTION:

A short history of Gypsy Punk

THE ORIGINS OF GYPSY PUNK

The story of Gypsy Punk begins with an explosion. Its origins can be dated to 26 April 1986, when nuclear reactor number four at the Chernobyl power plant in Ukraine blew up, causing devastating radioactive fallout. Eugene Nikolaev was thirteen years old and lived a hundred kilometres away in Kiev. He was brought up in a bohemian family; his mother was a dancer and singer, his uncle a circus acrobat. His father, Alex, was a butcher, but he had also played in the Ukrainian rock band Meridian and, in addition, military service had provided him with experience in radio scrambling. This meant that unlike most of their compatriots, the Nikolaevs were able to listen to Western radio broadcasts. These introduced Eugene to bands like The Doors, The Birthday Party and Einstürzende Neubauten, but, more importantly, they meant that his family were able to hear reports about the Chernobyl disaster before the Soviet government had publicised it. He describes hearing about the incident on the BBC's Russian Service:

I think they were reading a biography of Jim Morrison, and instead of that there was like an introduction, "Before we get to the biography of Jim Morrison and his music, there was a nuclear disaster on the territory of Ukraine, and everybody who lives upon it might take that into consideration, and, for best results, split."

And only a week later, there was an announcement on Soviet TV that something not so significant happened in Chernobyl.¹

'My dad left', he recalls in another interview. 'He came back with a gigameter, which once turned on, was clicking away.'² How the gigameter was obtained can only be speculated about, but Alex Nikolaev's foresight and technical aptitude meant that his family was one of the first to escape the radiation. They headed to the Carpathian region in Western Ukraine, where they had relatives. It was here that Eugene learned that some of these relatives were Roma, and that he was introduced to Romani music. He saw similarities between this kind of music and the Western punk and rock he had listened to in Kiev. Rural Carpaty also turned out to be far more of a cultural melting pot than the sterilised Soviet environment of Kiev; its cultural diversity foreshadowed the kind of environment he would find when he later moved to New York.³ The Nikolaevs were able to leave Ukraine in 1989 and advanced west through Hungary, Poland, Austria and Italy, before arriving in Vermont in 1991. After a few years living in New England, Eugene moved to New York City; it was here that he would go on to form Gogol Bordello, the band regarded as the progenitors of Gypsy Punk.

Gogol Bordello began in 1997 as an acoustic trio, consisting of Eugene Hütz (who had now adopted his mother's maiden name as his surname), guitarist Vlad Solovar and accordionist Sasha Kazatchkoff. They were joined in February 1998 by drummer Eliot Ferguson, who had recently moved to New York from California. From here the band started to develop a less acoustic style, and the sound of Gypsy Punk was realised. Ferguson recounts how he made the transition from playing with brushes to using regular drumsticks for a harder sound: 'That was really the beginnings of Gogol Bordello'⁴, he says. And Gogol Bordello was really the beginning of Gypsy Punk. They released their first album, *Voi-La Intruder*, in 1999,

¹ Marco Werman: 'Gogol Bordello', *Global Hit, The World*, 2 December 2004

<<http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/hppr/artsmain/article/4/70/714022/Pop/Gogol.Bordello/>>

² 'Nukes. Hütz. Headhunters.', *Studio 360*, 7 November 2008

<<http://www.studio360.org/episodes/2008/11/07/segments/114817>>

³ Susan Kessler: 'Gypsy Punk Rocker Eugene Hütz', *Passport Magazine*, July 2006

<<http://www.passportmagazine.ru/article/477/>>

⁴ DJ Scratchy: Interview with Eliot Ferguson, *Scratchy Sounds* (radio programme), 30 January 2008.

and by the next year, the term Gypsy Punk had been applied to them as well as to a handful of other bands. Gogol Bordello's live performances soon became well known around New York for their theatricality and high levels of energy. They became associated with bars in New York's Lower East Side, such as the Pizdetz and the Mehanata, which subsequently became mythologised in their work.

It was in 2002, shortly before the release of the second album, *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, that Gogol Bordello were first described as 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret'. It is unclear whether they chose this ascription for themselves – they had certainly cited all three cultures as influences – or whether it was assigned to them from outside. The term 'Gypsy Punk' had been applied to several other bands, including French Romani group Les Negresses Vertes, and Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica's band The No Smoking Orchestra. In New York, however, Gogol Bordello came to be at the centre of the increasingly popular Gypsy Punk subculture. *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, which is rooted in the Lower East Side but which also draws on an array of global musical sounds, ranging from the Balkans to Latin America, can be regarded as representative of early New York Gypsy Punk. By now Gogol Bordello's line-up had changed somewhat: Solovar and Kazatchkoff had been replaced by Oren Kaplan and Yuri Lemeshev, and Russian violinist Sergey Ryabtsev and Israeli Saxophonist Ori Kaplan had also been recruited, giving the band a fuller, more global sound. They began to garner increasing interest as a result of their constant touring, and by the time they released their third album, *Gypsy Punks: Underdog World Strike*, in 2005, they seemed to be at the height of their success.

ENGLAND, 2006

I discovered Gypsy Punk in 2006, but I can trace the origins of my encounter with the genre back to 2002. That was when I came across Jonathan Safran Foer's debut novel, *Everything is Illuminated*, while browsing in a library. The book tells the story of a young Jewish American travelling to Ukraine to try and track down the woman who had saved his grandfather from the Nazis during World War II. Intrigued by its premise, I borrowed it, but took it home with a stack of other

books, all of which seemed at the time to be far more interesting. *Everything is Illuminated* went back to the library unread. The following year, the book caught my attention upon its publication in paperback. I bought a copy, and this time I actually read it. The novel contains two embedded narratives. The first describes how the protagonist, Jonathan, carried out his search, and is purportedly written by his Ukrainian guide, Alex, in a comically broken English characterised by the misappropriation of many words. The second, narrated by Jonathan, is a fictionalised history of the Ukrainian shtetl where his ancestors lived. I was most impressed by this narrative, which brims over with surreal characters and situations, invented mythologies and bursts of magical realism; however, the tightness with which Foer weaves the two strands together creates an exceptionally rich story, dense with multiple histories.

A couple of years later, I learned that *Everything is Illuminated* was to be made into a film. I was anxious – perhaps the typical reaction of a fan to the potential adaptation of a text they admire. It seemed unlikely that any adaptation could do the novel justice, and since the film was the directorial debut of Liev Schrieber, there was no evidence to help me assess whether he would make a good job of it. When I heard that Jonathan was to be played by Elijah Wood I became even more suspicious. But of course, I knew all along that I would go and see the film when it came out. It arrived at my nearest art-house cinema in January 2006, and I duly went along to a screening. Although I was not overwhelmed, I was not as appalled as I had feared I might be. The magical history of the shtetl, which I had so admired, is not included in the film, and I was grateful that it had not been taken on, as it would surely have proved overambitious. As for Alex's strand of the narrative, it was adapted well, with the novel's humour and pathos being successfully carried over to the screen, and Elijah Wood made a credible Jonathan. All in all it was not a bad film, and a decent adaptation all the better for being aware of the limitations of cinema.

Yet there were two things about the film that particularly stood out for me. The first was the actor who played Alex; a lanky, angular man with enormous screen presence. The second was the soundtrack, which succeeded in reflecting both the Eastern European landscape and the Jewish themes. It was for the most

part lilting and jaunty, but there were at times powerful kicks of brass and coarse Russian vocals. The music was at its finest, I thought, as the closing credits rolled. An upbeat song driven by layers of accordion and fiddle played, as a man with a voice like a quarry raucously sang, 'Start wearing purple, wearing purple, start wearing purple for me now. / All your sanity and wits they will all vanish, I promise, it's just a matter of time'. The singer then broke into shouted Russian and general incoherence. It was joyous, anarchic, verging on lunatic. While it seemed to channel Eastern Europe through the cinema speakers, it also seemed to reach out beyond the Ukraine of *Everything is Illuminated* and produce a more global music. It was like Eurovision pumped up on steroids.

As soon as I got home, I logged on to the internet and looked up the soundtrack listings for *Everything is Illuminated*. The band responsible for 'Start Wearing Purple', the song which had grabbed me so firmly, was called Gogol Bordello. A little more online research revealed that the actor who played Alex was this band's lead singer, Eugene Hütz. I probed the net for more information and discovered that Gogol Bordello was comprised of a diverse group of immigrants based in New York, who played a style of music they described as Gypsy Punk. Initially, Hütz was only to feature, along with his bandmates, on the film's soundtrack. He says: 'originally, the producers wanted me to come in and have Gogol Bordello play the soundtrack to the film. I met Liev [Schrieber] and he was like, 'Wait a second, have you ever done any acting, my friend?' and that was that.'⁵

I immediately downloaded some of their songs, beginning with 'Start Wearing Purple'. The music was diverse and unpredictable, the only thing that was consistent from song to song was the ultra-high energy level. 'Dogs Were Barking' was a manic track that veered from European folk to dub and back again; 'Sally', one of the punkier songs, was about a girl who initiates a cultural revolution after an encounter with some 'gypsies'. 'Strange Uncles From Abroad', apparently a comment on clashing cultures, was propelled along by turbo-charged violin playing. I funnelled more and more of their music into my computer; I played it all

⁵ Swax McIver: '2nd Gogol, First Bordello...' *S. T. McIver*, 21 August 2007
<<http://http://stmciver.blogspot.co.uk/2007/08/2nd-gogol-first-bordello.html>>

the time, on my iPod, in my car, to as many friends as I could foist it upon. Never before had I been so enamoured of a band, but why Gogol Bordello had this effect on me I could not immediately determine. Although I have never been a serious fan of punk, it was something I appreciated in moderation; mixed up with 'gypsy' melodies and sung in multiple languages, it became something I was very happy to listen to on a more constant basis. The simple underpinnings of punk remained, but there seemed to be an endless potential for interest in the other elements of Gypsy Punk.

As its title suggests, *Gypsy Punks* remains the album that signifies most closely the movement that Gogol Bordello arguably began. It was the first of their albums to feature a bass player, and the extra flesh that this added to their punk skeleton was textured by the ever-present violin and accordion. *Gypsy Punks* combines energy and inventiveness while remaining closer to the East European sounds associated with Gypsy Punk than Gogol Bordello's subsequent releases, and this record certainly contributed to their growth in popularity. But there were also other factors that widened awareness of Gypsy Punk. Hütz's role in *Everything is Illuminated* was one. I was by no means the only person to discover Gogol Bordello as a result of this film; many other fans of the book, who had been drawn to the novel as a result of its East European and Jewish themes, were pleased to reencounter these in Gypsy Punk. While *Gypsy Punks* did not have mainstream success, it certainly cemented Gogol Bordello's status, and since 2005 they have been continually playing to sold-out crowds and large festivals.

In 2007, they released their fourth album, *Super Taranta*. The title, as well as some of the music, was inspired by the Italian Tarantella. Like *Gypsy Punks*, it also relied heavily on influences from 'gypsy' music and reggae, although the overall mood of the album was less punk. New York felt almost completely absent; *Super Taranta* was a more global record, though if it was grounded anywhere in particular then this was in the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. Just a few days before the release of *Super Taranta*, Gogol Bordello achieved another coup in terms of publicity. At the Live Earth concert in London, Hütz and violinist Sergey Ryabstev appeared as special guests during Madonna's headlining set; the event was reportedly watched by two billion people. Their guest slot included a

performance of traditional Romani song 'Pala Tute', which saw Madonna singing in Romani. Although in this appearance they seemed to take on the role of backing musicians, the exposure of Gogol Bordello and Gypsy Punk was undoubtedly increased.

Between this time and the recording of their fifth album, *Trans-Continental Hustle*, Hütz moved to the Brazil and Gogol Bordello's new material revealed that this move had clearly influenced his songwriting. The record was debuted in 2010; produced by Rick Rubin and released through Sony's label Columbia Records, it was Gogol Bordello's biggest release to date. They continue to tour unrelentingly; they played 130 shows in 2010, and 90 more in 2011. Meanwhile, new bands who have been influenced by Gogol Bordello continue to appear both in the USA and in Europe. A more electronic form of Gypsy Punk, known as Balkan Beats, also continues to grow in popularity. Critical reception of Gogol Bordello is mixed. While *Gypsy Punks* was extremely well received, their more recent releases have been reviewed less favourably. Despite this, they are still regarded as being amongst the best live bands currently performing.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Gypsy Punk is a form of music and subculture that reclaims and reimagines the figure of the 'gypsy', which generally functions as a means of exoticising and denigrating the Romani people. The founders and main proponents of the form are Gogol Bordello, comprised of immigrants who came together in New York. In their earliest incarnation, they proposed the idea of a 'Gypsy Punk revolution', which favours the authentic over what they regard as outmoded postmodern ideas. This revolution is not just concerned with the Roma, but also acts in opposition to discourses such as balkanism and false perceptions about the post-Soviet condition, and strives to engage with wider issues like migration and globalisation. The resulting product is a new form of musical discourse that foregrounds marginalised figures and presents them to a global audience. In this thesis, my aim is to interpret the mythologies of Gypsy Punk and to define it an immigrant music that is informed not only by the cultures of punk and of the

Roma, but also by the histories of migration that have contributed towards the composition of contemporary society. Within Gypsy Punk, the figure of the 'gypsy' and the figure of the immigrant are linked, laying the foundations for new ways of examining migrant cultures and the mythologies that they propagate.

I begin the thesis by breaking the term 'Gypsy Punk' into its component parts. The first chapter thus deals with the figure of the 'gypsy', and the Romani people from whose culture this figure derives. Here, I review the history and contemporary position of the Roma, and then go on to consider the 'gypsy' stereotype and how it has been constructed since the arrival of the Roma in Europe. I then consider the function of the 'gypsy' in Gypsy Punk, examining how Gogol Bordello engage with this figure and with the Romani people, and how their music and the message they present as a band are informed by these. Chapter Two deals with the broad spectrum of 'gypsy' music, a genre that is only roughly defined, and which incorporates many very different styles of music. Several of these are examined here, as I attempt to ascertain what the defining sound or feature of 'gypsy' music is, and determine whether Gypsy Punk can legitimately be regarded as a form of 'gypsy' music.

In the third chapter, an overview of punk music and culture, I determine which elements of punk have been adopted and adapted by Gypsy Punk. This requires engagement with punk as it arose during the 1970s on both sides of the Atlantic. Just as the Roma are different from the figure of the 'gypsy', the working-class subculture of punk in London is distinct from the movement that was propagated by art school students in New York. I also address the influence that reggae had on punk in London; this is important firstly because reggae, like Gypsy Punk, can be regarded as an immigrant music, and secondly because elements of reggae have been incorporated by Gogol Bordello and other Gypsy Punk bands. From here I consider the global manifestations and connotations of punk in order to connect it with the broader discourse of Gypsy Punk, and the figure of the immigrant, as represented in Gogol Bordello's work, is introduced.

Chapter Four sees 'gypsy' and 'punk' come together in the early stages of Gogol Bordello's career as a band. This chapter is organised as an examination of the artistic statement released by Gogol Bordello when they were performing as

part of the Whitney Museum of Modern Art's 2002 biennial. The statement can be read as a manifesto, which acts as a starting point for decoding the message of Gypsy Punk, and the revolution that Gogol Bordello have often invoked. I consider what this revolution entails, and in order to do so examine postmodern culture, notions of the authentic in music, globalisation and multiculturalism. Gogol Bordello have proposed an alternative idea of multiculturalism in the form of *Multi Kontra Culti*. This term is used in order to engage with areas such as immigration and authenticity, and therefore requires examination here. The concept of *Multi Kontra Culti* draws attention to globalisation and multiculturalism and encourages us to think of Gogol Bordello's Gypsy Punk as an immigrant music.

In Chapter Five I discuss the Balkan region and its impact of Gypsy Punk. Both the music and culture of Gogol Bordello are often regarded as 'Balkan' and it is true that elements of that region's culture can be found in their work. However, the word 'Balkan' has come to connote something more than simply an area of South-Eastern Europe and must be negotiated carefully. Maria Todorova's notion of balkanism, which concerns the way that Balkans have been perceived and constructed from outside, is crucial here. Having established this context, I go on to examine how the Balkans are presented in Gogol Bordello's work, and in other texts, and consider how Gypsy Punk can be related to the discourse of balkanism. A mythology can be observed in Gypsy Punk, of which the mythologised Balkans is just one element, and I refer to it intermittently throughout the thesis; however, it is in Chapter Six that this mythology is explicitly introduced and examined. The components of the mythology that are addressed here include the influence of the writer Nikolai Gogol, who provides the inspiration for Gogol Bordello's name; and Gogol Bordello's style of performance, including their use of elements taken from cabaret. Central to the argument of this chapter is an examination of how existing myths, such as those about the Roma and the Balkans, are adopted and subverted in Gypsy Punk, and how the new mythology created by Gogol Bordello interacts with these myths. The distinctive style and iconography of Gypsy Punk is important to the way that their mythology is deployed and an investigation into this comprises the latter half of the chapter.

In the final chapter, Chapter Seven, I develop the idea of immigrant music, and establish the place of Gypsy Punk within this perceived genre. This requires close readings of material by Gogol Bordello that deals with migration and the immigrant experience. I begin by examining another region that is important to Gypsy Punk – New York’s Lower East Side – and address the way that this neighbourhood has been mythologised as an immigrant space. As with the Balkans, Gogol Bordello have a very particular approach to engaging with New York in their work, and this is investigated here. I also reintroduce the concept of immigrant music and, in order to exemplify it, study several other musicians who can be considered to produce immigrant music; all are comparable with Gogol Bordello and Gypsy Punk, even though the sound of their music may be quite different. I also consider more closely the immigrant backgrounds of Gogol Bordello’s members, and how these have informed their music and its themes. In order to understand the idea of immigrant music more thoroughly, I differentiate between migrants, immigrants and nomads. Here, Deleuze and Guattari’s work on nomadology, which I appropriate for purposes rather more literal than its original intent, is useful. Finally, I reintroduce the figure of the ‘gypsy’, which of course appears regularly in Gypsy Punk. Placing the ‘gypsy’ alongside the figure of the immigrant, I consider how these two figures are used by Gogol Bordello in order to create a mythology of migration that functions as a counterpart to the immigrant music that they produce.

My use of the immigrant figure and introduction of the idea of immigrant music is intended as a counter to the ‘gypsy’ figure and current perceptions of ‘gypsy’ music. Musicologist David Malvinni has observed that ‘Gypsiness in music, which in the nineteenth century meant the carefree attitude of the suffering Gypsy fiddler, has perhaps recently undergone a broadening to include migrant categories such as the refugee. In other words, Gypsiness in music today has become an intensely politicized category’.⁶ Malvinni’s argument relates to music specifically, rather than the broader cultural context that I am considering in relation to Gypsy Punk in this thesis. However, his point that ‘gypsiness’ in music is increasingly politicised is highly relevant to Gypsy Punk: this is not only because

⁶ David Malvinni: *The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.65.

of the changing profile of the Romani people, but also due to the fact that the figure of the 'gypsy' is now being used by musicians to signify more than simply the traditional stereotype of the 'gypsy' figure. In the case of Gogol Bordello's Gypsy Punk, the 'gypsy' is used as an access route into discourses about migration. Gogol Bordello, I argue, go beyond the established notion of 'gypsiness' in music and produce a form that is better described as immigrant music. While a number of established perceptions surround the 'gypsy' and 'gypsy' music, immigrant music is a less loaded and more empowered term.

NOMENCLATURE

Since 'gypsy' is considered by many to be a derogatory term, a note on its use in this thesis is important. At the most basic level, the *Oxford English Dictionary's* primary definition of 'gypsy' is, 'A member of a wandering race (by themselves called *Romany*), of Hindu origin, which first appeared in England about the beginning of the 16th c. and was then believed to have come from Egypt.'⁷ This is an authoritative definition, and a broadly correct one, but it is not without its imperfections. Firstly, although the Romani people have tended to travel widely, resulting in their presence all over the world, most Roma are no longer nomadic, so to claim that they are a 'wandering race' is not accurate. It is also incorrect to suggest that 'Romany' is used as a self-designation, as many in Anglophone countries refer to themselves as 'gypsies'. Their origins are widely held to be in Rajasthan, but evidence has been given both for and against this.⁸ To state that they are of 'Hindu origin', however, is difficult to support.

The problems that can be found in the *OED's* definition draw attention to the differences between the words 'gypsy' and 'Roma'. Whereas the 'gypsy' is associated with wandering, along with other stereotypes such as fortune telling and criminality, Roma is a less loaded term and its use helps to avoid the

⁷ 'gipsy | gypsy', *n*, The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/78443>>

⁸ For example Ian Hancock claims that 'there has been no real doubt about an Indian origin for the Romani people for over two centuries' ('The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism' in Crowe & Kolsti (eds.): *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), p.134.) but Judith Okely is more sceptical (*The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 8-13).

perpetuation of stereotyping. However, there has been a tendency for the words to be used interchangeably, even in scholarly writing that is supposed to be providing an accurate portrayal of the Roma and issues which relate to them. For example, Zoltan Barany admits in the introduction to his study of the Roma in post-communist Eastern Europe that he switches between the two terms for aesthetic reasons.⁹ I prefer to follow the example set by Alaina Lemon in her book on the Roma and performance in Russia, which allows for subtle distinctions between the two terms to convey nuanced meaning. She notes, 'I use either term in quotes to report direct speech, tsygan or Gypsy without quotes to represent stereotypy, and Roma (plural), Romani (feminine singular), Rom (masculine singular), and Romani (adjective) to denote individuals or collectives.'¹⁰

For my own purposes, I have adopted a slightly different system, which follows Lemon's precedent. When referring to the Romani people, I use the words 'Roma' and 'Romani'. The word 'gypsy', which I write in quotation marks to acknowledge its potential to be derogatory or offensive, is used to signify the mythologised, exoticised construction of the Roma that often appears in non-Romani representations. I will often refer to 'gypsy' music rather than Romani music, since this music has also in many cases been the product of exoticism and reconstruction by outsiders. When discussing Gypsy Punk, I do not use quotation marks, since this has different connotations from both the Roma and the figure of the 'gypsy'; in these instances the words are always capitalised, so that it is clear that I am referring specifically to the genre that has Gogol Bordello at its centre.

⁹ Zoltan Barany: *The East European Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.1.

¹⁰ Alaina Lemon: *Between Two Fires* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p.5.

CHAPTER ONE:

'You love our music but you hate our guts': Romani identity and the figure of the 'gypsy'

WHAT IS A 'GYPSY'?

It would be impossible to examine Gypsy Punk without having an understanding of what is meant by the word 'gypsy'. This might appear to be an obvious point, and 'gypsy' may at first seem very easy to define, but it is in fact a loaded term; the figure of the 'gypsy' is an ambiguous one with a fraught and complex history. Moreover, it is important to establish not only what 'gypsy' means in a general context, but also what it signifies in the context of Gypsy Punk. In this chapter, therefore, I will distinguish between the Romani people and the figure of the 'gypsy', and then identify the Romani and 'gypsy' influences on Gogol Bordello. I am concerned less with providing a full account of the Roma's history, and more with examining how they have been perceived throughout that history. Nevertheless, it is important to identify falsehoods about the Roma that have been perpetuated as if fact, and to bear in mind that many different perceptions about them will have informed Gypsy Punk, whether or not these are correct.

A review of previous attempts at defining 'gypsy' suggests that it is easier to identify what the word does not stand for than what it does. As Angus Fraser writes in the introduction to his study, *The Gypsies*, 'If a people is a group of men, women and children with a common language, a common culture and a common racial type, who can be readily distinguished from their neighbours, it is long time since the Gypsies were that.'¹ Ian Hancock, who identifies himself as Romani, agrees with this point, and demonstrates how it informs the self-identification of

¹ Angus Fraser: *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.1.

Roma. He states that 'any sense of having once been a single people has long been lost, the common factor now being an awareness not of what we *are*, but of what all of us are *not*. Romanies are not *gadže* or non-Romani people.'² Social historian Wim Willems describes how our understanding of what 'gypsies' are is shaped, when he writes, 'Four parties are, in principle, involved in the process of arriving at a definition of Gypsies: those being defined, i.e. Gypsies, the authorities (church and state), academics, and – however vague it may sound – the population at large.'³ This is a revealing statement in that it shows that there is potential for considerable discrepancies between definitions of the 'gypsy'.

The task is made even more complex when we consider the range of peoples who are referred to as 'gypsies'. Willems states that 'The term 'Gypsies' appears to embrace different ethnic groups with their own designations, such as *Gitanos*, *Sinti*, *Rom* and *Kalderas*, while in some countries, including England and Ireland, native travellers are also called 'Gypsies'. To what extent these groups share a common descent remains to be seen.'⁴ This suggests that Roma and 'gypsies' are distinct groups. Ian Hancock, on the other hand, regards many of these various appellations as being incorrectly applied names used by non-Roma:

While this scattered population, which numbers about 12 million worldwide, calls itself *Romani*, the people among whom it lives refer to it by a great many other names: 'Gypsies', 'Zigeuner', 'Gitanos', 'Heiden', 'Cigani' and so on. And though everybody knows the 'Gypsies', far fewer really know the Romanies. Here are a people with two identities – their own actual Romani identity and the one that is familiar to most non-Romanies and which is reflected by those many other names.⁵

Hancock also insists on the use of the term 'Romani', saying that 'other depictions with other names are misleading, and sometimes even harmful.'⁶ However, he

² Ian Hancock: *We Are the Romani People* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2002), p.xx.

³ Wim Willems: *In Search of the True Gypsy*, trans. Don Bloch (London: Frank Cass, 1997), p.7.

⁴ Willems, p.5.

⁵ Hancock, p.xvii.

⁶ Hancock, p.xvii.

acknowledges that “Gitanos in Spain seem to have little in common with ‘Gypsies’ in England or with ‘Tattare’ in Sweden or ‘Tsigani’ in Romania.’ He continues with the statement that ‘we all call ourselves Romani’, which is not strictly true since, while some Roma find ‘gypsy’ an offensive slur, others use it to refer to themselves. However, his point that the Roma have two identities is an excellent one; though it is perhaps rather tenuous claims about what defines the Romani people that have led to their being simultaneously vilified and romanticised.

While these are global sentiments, it is Western perceptions of the Roma that are the most important sources here. Although these are not necessarily the most reliable sources, I will take a Western perspective in considering how the Roma are perceived and in my choice of sources and literature; this is because Gypsy Punk began in the West and was played primarily for Western audiences. Gogol Bordello is a global band that has the capacity to draw on elements from the cultures of all of its members, but the site of its origins and activity is the West: the band was formed in New York and plays for audiences primarily in the USA, Canada and Western Europe. As such, the ‘gypsy’ as it appears in Gypsy Punk is likely to be a Western construction that is augmented by outside elements. Although Gogol Bordello seek to avoid stereotypes and negative perceptions of the Roma, and consciously align themselves with Roma Rights organisations, they have clearly not felt precluded from using the word ‘gypsy’ in their chosen genre designation Gypsy Punk. In addition, Eugene Hütz and his colleagues seem to use ‘Roma’ and ‘gypsy’ interchangeably in interviews. This suggests that ‘gypsy’ is not clearly defined in the context of Gypsy Punk. However, before questioning the presentation of the ‘gypsy’ in Gogol Bordello’s work any further, it is important to differentiate between the Romani people and the figure of the ‘gypsy’.

THE ROMANI PEOPLE

Reliable information about the Roma can be difficult to find; this is the case even with basic detail such as population figures. Although the Romani people are a substantial global minority group, estimates of their exact populations vary significantly. This is due to a lack of official census data; many Roma are not

recorded on censuses and many more choose not to declare that they are Roma. The Council of Europe estimates that there are between ten and twelve million Roma in Europe alone; even if this is an overestimation, we can conclude from more conservative estimates related to individual countries worldwide that there are certainly at least this many Roma globally. They can be found all over the world, but their largest populations are in Europe. France, Spain and Italy all have very substantial populations, but East European and Balkan countries, particularly Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia, have the highest concentrations of Romani people. Since they are widely dispersed and have no designated homeland or nation state, and since many Roma have lived nomadic lifestyles, they are often disassociated from particular places. Speculation about their origins as a race, and lack of knowledge regarding their history, has led to them being thought of as a people without a past. These perceptions can be found not only in popular discourse, but also in some scholarly works. 'History has been an alien concept in Romani culture,' says Zoltan Barany, 'where the dead are rarely mentioned and seldom become the subjects of commemoration'⁷.

Alaina Lemon has noted that 'Gypsies are usually depicted not only as people "without history" but as indifferent to recollection, living in an "eternal present."⁸ But 'Roma nevertheless are and speak of themselves as connected to local places and pasts.'⁹ They are also connected to a single, unifying past; it is generally agreed, based on linguistic and genetic evidence, that their origins lie in Rajasthan, in north-western India, and that they gradually migrated westwards and became dispersed. The motive for their initial migration from India is uncertain, but numerous suggestions have been made. Hancock has argued that the Roma were a warrior caste, who were engaged in fighting the Muslim Ghaznavid Empire, which repeatedly invaded India during the eleventh century.¹⁰ He believes that they began as an assembly of non-Aryans, who were considered by the Aryan castes to be expendable in battle, and accordingly were sent to the front line. As this army fought the invaders, they gradually took a westerly

⁷ Zoltan Barany: *The East European Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.205.

⁸ Alaina Lemon: *Between Two Fires* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p.3.

⁹ Lemon, p.3.

¹⁰ Ian Hancock: 'Origins of the Romani People', *The Patrín Web Journal*, 1999.

<<http://www.reocities.com/~patrin/history.htm>>

trajectory, and commenced their migration in this way. Ronald Lee dates the beginning of the diaspora to the same period, but goes a step further. His theory is that some of the Indian troops defeated by the Muslims were incorporated into the Ghaznavid army, and then became involved in raids in regions further east, such as Armenia. Displaced from India, this group of captive refugees eventually began to take on an identity that differentiated them from both their conquerors and their ancestors.¹¹

However their diaspora began, it is indisputable that having moved gradually west through Persia and the Middle East, many Roma found a new homeland in the Balkans, where large Romani populations continue to live. Hancock dates their first appearance in Europe to the end of thirteenth century¹²; there were certainly Roma in Europe shortly after this time, of whom many were enslaved. This seems to have begun almost as soon as they appeared in the Balkans: Fraser says that 'the first mention of Gypsies in Rumanian archives occurs in a document issued in 1385 [...that...] confirmed the grant of 40 families of Gypsies'¹³, while Hancock cites references to Romani slaves that date back to earlier than 1355.¹⁴ Meanwhile, David Crowe stresses that the widespread slavery of the Roma that occurred for centuries in parts of what is now Romania set the precedent for that country's particularly poor record of Roma integration, which persists to this day.¹⁵ Although not all Roma were enslaved, persecution was universal. They were not permitted to lead nomadic lifestyles and were often subjected to unfair trials. Although the murder of Roma was not officially permitted, it was rarely punished. Fraser has written that 'Had all the anti-Gypsy laws which sprang up been enforced uncompromisingly, even for a few months, the Gypsies would have been eradicated from most of Christian Europe well before the middle of the sixteenth century.'¹⁶ It was not until 1864, shortly after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in the United States, that Romani slaves in the Balkans

¹¹ Ronald Lee: 'A New Look at our Romani Origins and Diaspora', *Romano Kopachi*, 2009.

<<http://kopachi.com/articles/a-new-look-at-our-romani-origins-and-diaspora-by-ronald-lee/>>

¹² Hancock: *We Are the Romani People*, p.1.

¹³ Fraser, p.58.

¹⁴ Hancock: *The Pariah Syndrome* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, 1987), p.16.

¹⁵ David Crowe: 'The Gypsy Historical Experience in Romania', David Crowe and John Kolsti (eds.): *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), p.61.

¹⁶ Fraser, p.131. For a more detailed catalogue of laws passed against the Roma and other forms of persecution, see Hancock: *The Pariah Syndrome* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, 1987).

gained what Fraser describes as ‘complete legal freedom’¹⁷. This period of slavery is a lengthy antecedent to a trend of persecution that continues to the present day. Regarded as savage intruders with unknown origins, they have been reviled and subjected to severe discrimination.

This reached its nadir in the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany, a major manifestation of the persecution of the Roma that is often overlooked. Although a number of historians and scholars of Romani studies have begun to comment on the lack of attention that the Holocaust’s Romani victims have received, and attempts to rectify this deficiency have lately been made, the loss of Romani life that occurred is still generally treated as a footnote to the mass extermination of the Jews. Although it is impossible to determine how many Roma died in the Holocaust – this is compounded by unreliable data concerning their population – Hancock estimates that ‘over half of the Romani population in Nazi-occupied Europe’¹⁸ was killed. As Barany points out, ‘The extermination of the Gypsies was far less meticulously documented by the Nazis and their collaborators than was the murder of the Jews’¹⁹, and the Roma themselves, being largely illiterate, were less able to record their ordeal in writing. The latter of these problems has persisted long after the end of the Third Reich: while many Jewish survivors have written accounts of the Holocaust, fewer Roma have been able to do so. Romani Holocaust survivors remain marginalised by governments, receiving substantially fewer reparations than their Jewish counterparts and encountering a resistance towards Romani Holocaust memorials: ‘A specific demand to compensate Gypsy victims was never presented by the Allies, as was done with regard to Jewish victims,’ observes Gilad Margalit.²⁰

Systematic extermination of this kind is undoubtedly as severe as persecution of any race or group can be, but the end of the Second World War nonetheless brought a fresh form of oppression for the Roma. With most of Eastern Europe now under Communist rule, the Roma who lived there were expected to conform to the expectations of this system. Accordingly, they were

¹⁷ Fraser, p.226.

¹⁸ Hancock: *We Are the Romani People*, p.34.

¹⁹ Barany, p.103.

²⁰ Gilad Margalit: *Germany and its Gypsies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p.83.

required to integrate, and any outward display of their particular culture was generally forbidden. In many cases being Romani was simply not permitted, and Roma were expected to define themselves as, for example, Bulgarian or Yugoslavian. This forced identity is one reason for a lack of reliable census data by which Romani populations might be measured today. Many East European Roma now pine for the greater stability and socialist public services that they were afforded during the socialist era, and while many were better off in socioeconomic terms, it was at the expense of their distinct identity.

It was not only identity that was revoked; many Roma in Eastern Europe also lost their mobility due to communist policy concerning nomadism.²¹ This was not a particularly new practice; almost since their first arrival in Eastern Europe Roma have been encouraged to settle, often in order that they could be taxed or enslaved. Fraser notes that Maria Theresa, ruler of the Habsburg Empire from 1740-1780, passed a number of decrees aimed at removing the ethnic identity of the Roma so that they might be incorporated into the Hungarian race.²² Although these were not fully enforced they will have contributed towards bringing the roaming of the Roma to a halt. This drive towards forcing them into settlement was finalised under communism; attempts were made throughout the communist controlled countries of Eastern Europe to assimilate the Roma as far as possible. This was often an aggressive process: Angus Bancroft describes how in Poland the 'measures carried out included the removal of wheels from trailers and shooting of horses.'²³ According to Barany, 'Initially, at least, the communist regimes' notion of assimilation appeared to be as simple as the application of the formula: (Gypsy) + (socialist wage-labor) + housing = (socialist worker) + (Gypsy folklore).'²⁴ Active initiatives towards assimilation began soon after the end of World War II: in Romania 'by the early 1950s the majority of nomadic Roma were settled'²⁵, and most other countries were not far behind. The techniques used to produce this situation varied from offers of accommodation and employment to outright bans

²¹ This is not a policy that is confined to either communism or Eastern Europe; regulations in the United Kingdom, for example, have made it increasingly more difficult for Roma to travel and, as a result, many have become settled.

²² Fraser, p.157.

²³ Angus Bancroft: *Roma and Gypsy-Travellers in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p29.

²⁴ Barany, p.114.

²⁵ Barany, p.120.

on movement. With the traditionally wandering Roma settled, they could be controlled more easily. In addition, animosity towards them meant that there was a desire to present them as being fewer in number than they actually were. Since there is a popular conflation of 'gypsy' culture and nomadic lifestyles, it was their nomadism as much as anything else that marked the Roma out as 'gypsies', so rescinding this was seen as a way of revoking their identity.

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the idea of nomadology as a method of resisting the territorialisation that they regard as a means for the application of power and control. In this context, they have described attempts at sedentarisation as they might be applied to any nomadic group:

We know of the problems States have always had with journeyman's associations, or *compagnonnages*, the nomadic or itinerant bodies of the type formed by masons, carpenters, smiths etc. Settling, sedentarizing labor power, regulating the movements of the flow of labor, assigning it channels and conduits [...] – this has always been one of the principal affairs of the State, which undertook to conquer both a *band vagabondage* and a *body nomadism*.²⁶

This is a passage that seems ripe for application to discussion of the Roma. However, Lemon, who stresses the historical and spatial connections of Romani people, argues that 'The image of wandering leads to faulty abstractions about diaspora: all humans travel and shift. The challenge may be less to construct a "nomadology" for Gypsies [...] than to see that Roma, too, belong to places.'²⁷ While this is perhaps a more constructive way of engaging with contemporary Roma, nomadology and sedentarisation are nonetheless useful concepts to apply when considering the figure of the 'gypsy', as well as the history of the Romani people and the oppression that has been prominent throughout their history.

The situation of Roma today is a product of this oppression. Throughout

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p.406.

²⁷ Lemon, p.4.

Europe, the majority are sedentary and many live in ghettoized camps in poor conditions. Poverty is ubiquitous and unemployment levels are extremely high. Integration with the wider community is minimal and persecution is rife. In many countries there is no support from governments, and discrimination is widespread. A disproportionate number of Roma are in prison, and this fuels the stereotype that they have a propensity towards criminality; in fact they are often the scapegoats for crime, and are frequently sentenced harshly. Roma have limited access to many public facilities, and have far lower literacy levels: their culture places greater emphasis on the family unit than on formal education, so many young Roma do not attend school. This is an even more pronounced situation in Eastern Europe, where those who seek education are often denied it. One recent issue is the Slovakian practice of placing Romani children in schools for the disabled, where the curricula give them fewer opportunities for educational development.²⁸

In Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia there have been an increasing number of reports of right-wing groups targeting the Roma in violent attacks that continue with little to impede them.²⁹ There is also persecution in Western Europe, often from the authorities. In Italy in 2008, for example, the government began to fingerprint Romani people, including children, as part of a census, in an initiative said to be an attempt to reduce crime; evidently, stereotypes that they are responsible for crime persist.³⁰ There have also been numerous attacks on the camps where Roma live, often in poor conditions on the outskirts of cities. More recently, the French government has begun to demolish camps that are considered to be illegal settlements, and many Romani people have been repatriated to Romania and Bulgaria.³¹ In the UK, the country's largest Roma and Traveller site,

²⁸ Ian Traynor: 'Apartheid in the heart of Europe: how Roma children lose out on education', *The Guardian*, 16 November 2007, p.25.

²⁹ Nicholas Kulish: 'As Economic Turmoil Mounts, So Do Attacks on Hungary's Gypsies', *New York Times*, 26 April 2009

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/27/world/europe/27hungary.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=Nicholas%20Kulish,%20Gypsies&st=cse> For a more in-depth (though less up to date) account of the situation of Hungarian Roma see Rachel Guglielmo and Timothy Waters: *Rights Denied: The Roma of Hungary* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996).

³⁰ Aidan Lewis: 'Italy torn by racial strains', *BBC News*, 4 February 2009

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7858012.stm>>

³¹ 'France sends Roma Gypsies back to Romania', *BBC News*, 20 August 2010

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11020429>>

Dale Farm, was declared illegal in 2010 and subsequently cleared, despite high-profile protests.³² Meanwhile, anti-Roma sentiment remains highly visible, in both public policy and in the media.³³ On the same day that the British media reported the planned eviction of Roma living at Dale Farm, *The Daily Express* ran a front-page article with the headline 'Gypsy in £3m Benefit Fiddle'³⁴.

Despite the prevalence of discrimination and persecution there are increasing instances of Romani activism and the Roma Rights movement that has emerged in the past few decades seeks to raise awareness of the culture and issues surrounding the Roma. Romani Organisations have been formed both globally and specifically in Eastern Europe, and the number of these continues to grow.³⁵ While the development of such groups has been slow, they remain in their infancy, and the recent increase in Romani activism suggests that understanding of the Roma can only be expected to develop. The Romany World Congress has met six times since 1971, and has sought to promote the rights of Roma and their culture; the International Romani Union was founded at the second congress, in 1978. Meanwhile, the European Roma Rights Centre aims to combat racism and human rights abuse against the Roma and supports activism. At present, we are over halfway through the Decade of Roma Inclusion, an initiative launched by European governments in 2005 with the aim of improving the status of Roma. It emphasises the importance of Roma participation to its success, and strives to engage with Romani organisations.

Although some obstacles have been overcome, there remains much work to be done in the field of Roma Rights. One problem is that stereotyping remains rife, even in academic texts. For example, when discussing the progress that has been made, Derek Hawes and Barbara Perez wrote:

The very notion of Gypsydom is antipathetic to the creation of a

³² Rachel Stevenson: 'Dale Farm Travellers: We won't just get up and leave', *The Guardian*, 27 July 2010, G2 p.13.

³³ For a more in-depth investigation of portrayals of Roma in the British media, see Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers: *Insiders, outsiders and others: Gypsies and identity* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008), pp.145-174. Here representations of 'gypsies' in *The Sun* and *The Independent* in 2005 are analysed.

³⁴ Mark Reynolds: 'Gypsy in £3m Benefit Fiddle', *The Daily Express*, 27 July 2010, p.1.

³⁵ See Barany, p.207.

coherent programme of action or campaign for recognition and respect for Gypsies in the modern world. There is no Zionist dream to act as the central unifying nexus like that which sustained the Jews throughout a 2,000 year diaspora. No religious faith or body of literature unites, through time and space, a Romany people; even the common language is a poor fragmented thing, long since degenerated to a crude patois, only of philological interest.³⁶

This passage sums up the difficulties that may be encountered in attempts to engage with the Roma as a single group, but it also reveals the extent to which they are thought of as being disconnected and thoroughly separate, not only from non-Roma but also from each other. It is something of an ambiguous comment; Hawes and Perez seem to have an interest in Roma Rights, but fall into the stereotypical discourse identified by Lemon, in which the Roma are detached from places and histories. This reveals that even when intentions towards the Roma are good, the prevalence of stereotypes means that they are difficult to avoid. These stereotypes have come together to generate the imagined figure of the 'gypsy', which informs common attitudes towards the Roma.

THE FIGURE OF THE 'GYPSY'

Although Roma have always fascinated outside observers, who have been curious about their origins and their way of life, the way that their culture has been received by non-Roma reveals a marked dichotomy. Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers sum this up when they write:

The use of the word 'Gypsy' and also, more recently, 'Traveller' in some media coverage portrays a stereotypical image of a type of person and associated behaviour [...]. Such usage tends to be compounded by the often highly contrasting ways that Gypsy

³⁶ Derek Hawes and Barbara Perez: *The Gypsy and the State: The ethnic cleansing of British society* (Bristol: SAUS Publications, 1995), p.144.

groups are represented. If, on the one hand, the idea of the Gypsy is a romanticised and exoticised image, on the other it is associated with dirt, idleness and disruption.³⁷

Certain cultural aspects, particularly music, dress and folklore, have long been attractive to the nationals of every country that has a Romani population. However, other aspects, such as notions of hygiene and cleanliness, and attitudes to work and money, are typically regarded with disdain. The Roma have thus been simultaneously romanticised and vilified. Gogol Bordello's song 'Break the Spell' includes the line 'You love our music but you hate our guts'; this effectively sums up the general attitude of non-Roma towards the Roma. This lyric exhibits Gogol Bordello's concern with combating discrimination against Romani people, but their work is also informed by exoticised perceptions that have a tendency to go hand in hand with such discrimination.

These perceptions continue to be perpetuated, but in order to show how deeply entrenched they are it is worth considering the 'gypsy' in some of the many fictional texts from the nineteenth century and earlier that present Romani characters. We will also see that the figure of the 'gypsy' was presented in a very similar way throughout Europe. Katie Trumpener has described the Roma as having been 'reduced to a textual effect'³⁸ rather than being permitted a representative history; as we shall see, the Roma are misrepresented by such portrayals, which have come to inform continuing perceptions more strongly than accurate studies. One well-known example of a 'gypsy' figure is the character of Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), who is thought of as an archetypal romantic hero. Although his origins are unknown, since he was found as an infant on the streets of Liverpool, the first impression of him that is shared with readers is that, 'He is a dark skinned gypsy, in aspect, in dress, and manners a gentleman, that is as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he has an erect and

³⁷ Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers: *Insiders, outsiders and others: Gypsies and identity* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008), p.20.

³⁸ Katie Trumpener: 'The Time of the Gypsies: A "People without History" in the Narratives of the West', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Summer 1992), p.869.

handsome figure, and rather morose'³⁹. Whether or not Heathcliff is supposed to be a Rom, he is portrayed as a 'gypsy' not only in his physical appearance – dark, attractive but somewhat unkempt – but also in his characterisation, as passionate yet savage and ultimately unknowable.

While *Wuthering Heights* is the best-known text from this period that presents a 'gypsy' figure, the most detailed characterisations of 'gypsies' can be found in the work of the linguist George Borrow, who had a lifelong interest in 'gypsies'. His autobiographical novel *Lavengro* (1851) and its sequel *The Romany Rye* (1857) provide an account of Borrow's youth which devotes a considerable portion of its narrative to this fascination. This is connected to his interest in linguistics (Borrow is reported to have learned many languages, and 'Lavengro' is the Romani word for 'linguist'), and his ability to communicate with Romani people in their own tongue is presented as an important part of his good relations with them. Although Borrow produced some accurate accounts of Romani life in both England and Spain, and a Romani dictionary, *Romano Lavo-Lil*, his presentation of the Roma in *Lavengro* conforms to the typical exoticised view. His primary 'gypsy' character, Jasper Petulengro, is a gambling, horse dealing, fist fighting nomad who only works out of strict economic necessity. The other main 'gypsy' figure is Mrs Hearne, a short-tempered woman who decamps to Yorkshire after a row with Borrow. When he re-encounters her she feeds him a poisoned cake; thereafter there are numerous references to poisoning or 'drubbing' pigs, a dishonest means of obtaining food that is employed frequently by Borrow's 'gypsies'. The Romani language is used to describe this process, and this gives the act of deception a sense of mystery that forms part of the unknowable quality of 'gypsies'.

Borrow adopted an itinerant lifestyle in an attempt to better understand and empathise with his Romani subjects. It is likely that this was a very deliberate move, but in his novels he presents it as though it was a state he fell into quite naturally. Having struggled to earn a living in London by writing, he leaves the city as soon as he has managed to sell a book; subsequently he travels indiscriminately from place to place. After some time he buys a wagon from a disheartened tinker and takes to the road. When he describes his attempts at taking up the tinker's

³⁹ Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.47.

trade, he writes in a mixture of English and Romani, and draws particular attention to this, saying that 'whilst I am making a horse-shoe the reader need not be surprised if I speak in the language of the lord of the horse-shoe – Mr Petulengro⁴⁰.'⁴¹ His adopted 'gypsiness' is something he continues to emphasise when conversing with a Catholic priest who takes to visiting him in the wooded depression where he has set up camp. When the priest asks who he is, Borrow says:

"Do you know the name of this place?"

"I was told it was Mumpers' or Gypsies' Dingle," said the man in black.

"Good," said I; "and this forge and tent, what do they look like?"

"Like the forge and tent of a wandering Zigan; I have seen the like in Italy."

"Good," said I; "they belong to me."

"Are you, then, a gypsy?" said the man in black.

"What else should I be?"⁴²

However, the priest is unconvinced by Borrow, citing his literacy and knowledge of Armenian as the reason he presumes him to be not a 'gypsy', but 'a philologist, who, for some purpose, has taken up a Gypsy life'⁴³. Borrow is reluctant to admit that he is not a 'gypsy', as this would de-mythologize his way of life. While it is considered acceptable, and even romantic, for a 'gypsy' to be without fixed home or occupation, the romanticised view of an untamed figure living freely as a nomad does not compensate for the vilification to which the Roma are habitually subjected. A non-Roma who adopts this kind of lifestyle acquires 'gypsy' associations, but gains none of the exotic qualities assigned to this figure, and is thus an object of disdain. However, as we shall see later in this chapter, 'gypsy' identity is not always connected to race or ethnicity.

⁴⁰ 'Petulengro' is Romany for 'Smith'.

⁴¹ George Borrow: *Lavengro* (New York: Dover, 1991), p.445.

⁴² Borrow, p.485.

⁴³ Borrow, p.486.

The kind of fascination with the Roma that led to such fictional representations was of course not confined to writing in English. Amongst the earliest examples is Cervantes' novel *La Gitanilla* (1613). This text begins with the following description, which proves how enduring the association between 'gypsies' and theft has been: 'It should seem that the race of Gypsies, male and female, are only born into the world to be thieves; their parents are thieves, they are bred up thieves, they study thieving'⁴⁴. It is also significant that the central character, who is distinguished from the other 'gypsies' on account of her beauty, musical talent and ability to read and write, is in fact a non-Roma who was stolen by 'gypsies' as an infant. Two centuries later, the French writer Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen* (1845), which was the source for Bizet's famous opera, introduced another well known 'gypsy' character.⁴⁵ If Heathcliff is an archetypal male romantic hero, then Carmen serves as a female counterpart. In this text, we find Mérimée travelling in Spain, where he encounters his heroine. In their first exchange, he attempts to determine where she is from, first guessing Córdoba or Andalucía, then that she is from the Middle East, or Moorish. Carmen replies that she is in fact 'bohémienne', a 'gypsy'⁴⁶. Like Heathcliff, she is strikingly attractive; her beauty is described as 'strange and savage'⁴⁷. Carmen is initially presented as a fortune teller; we later learn that she was an outlaw who married a man on the run; when she leaves him for another man, he stabs her to death. Confessing his murder, he says that it is the Roma who are ultimately to blame, for the way in which they raised Carmen.⁴⁸

As she is killed, Carmen declares that she 'will always be free'⁴⁹. This is a desire that is often associated with the Roma; a similar reference can be found in Alexander Pushkin's narrative poem 'The Gypsies' (1824). This text in fact has a similar plot to *Carmen*; a young man named Aleko falls in love with a Romani girl,

⁴⁴ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra: *La Gitanilla*, trans. John Ozell (London: D. Midwinter, 1709), p.1.

⁴⁵ Mérimée is partly informed by the work of George Borrow. The final chapter of *Carmen* provides contextual information about the 'bohémiens' of Spain, in which Mérimée provides a typical description of the 'gypsies' as a swarthy race who make their living my driving mules and begging, and cites Borrow's descriptions of the Roma in Spain, in *The Bible in Spain* (1843) as a source.

⁴⁶ Prosper Mérimée: 'Carmen', Prosper Mérimée: *Romans et Nouvelles*, vol. II (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1967), p.359.

⁴⁷ Mérimée, p.360.

⁴⁸ Mérimée, p.402.

⁴⁹ Mérimée, p.401.

Zemfira; when she leaves him for another man, he murders her and her new lover. The notion that she, like all 'gypsies', must be free, is reiterated throughout 'The Gypsies'; indeed, this is apparent from the very start of the poem:

Like freedom their encampment feels
Joyful, their sleep beneath the skies
Carefree; among the wagon-wheels,
Half-covered with scant canopies,
Fires burn, with families intent
Upon their supper; on the lea
The horses graze; behind one tent
A bear lies fast asleep and free.⁵⁰

In addition to the concern with freedom that can be observed here, there are numerous other features characteristic of depictions of 'gypsies': the campfire, the 'scant canopies' suggestive of limited resources, and the dancing bear that provides a source of income. We may also detect a precedent for Borrow's writing here, in the character of Aleko, who joins a Romani caravan. The trope of a non-Roma, often an outlaw, living amongst the 'gypsies' can frequently be observed in texts that centre around 'gypsy' characters. In Pushkin's poem, Zemfira introduces Aleko to her father, and explains his situation:

"Father," declares the girl, "I found
A guest out there, beside a mound;
I've asked him home to stay with us.
He wants to be a gypsy too;
The law is after him, he says,
But I shall be his love and true["]"⁵¹

In a highly romanticised rendering of Romani culture, Pushkin has the old man accept this arrangement without question, and invite Aleko to take up a traditional

⁵⁰ Alexander Pushkin: 'The Gypsies', trans. Antony Wood (London: Angel Books, 2006), p.3.

⁵¹ Pushkin, p.4.

‘gypsy’ occupation:

Be one of us, and live our life –
The threadbare freedom of the road.
We’re off tomorrow with our load;
Choose a trade to suit your flair,
Blacksmith, singer, or the bear.⁵²

The overall suggestion of ‘The Gypsies’ is that it is easy to become a ‘gypsy’ and that in doing so one can lead a carefree lifestyle. Another figure who attempted to ‘become’ a ‘gypsy’ in this way was the artist Augustus John. His fascination with the Roma was lifelong and, in common with Borrow, he had an interest in the Romani language – a product of his friendship with John Sampson, who was writing a book about the language, entitled *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales*⁵³. Eventually, John was to become so immersed in the image of the ‘gypsy’ that he fabricated a heritage for himself, saying that ‘As for Gypsies, I have not encountered a sounder “Gypsy” than myself. My mother’s name was Petulengro, remember, and we descend from Tubel-Cain via Parcelsus.’⁵⁴ His biographer, Michael Holroyd, summarises the impression that the Roma he encountered made on him:

The tents, the wagons, the gaily painted carts and great shining flanks of the horses, the sight of the women with their children, stirred Augustus in a way he could not explain. [...] their extraordinary names, and the mystery and antiquity of their origins conjured up a world, remote yet sympathetic, to which he felt he should have belonged.⁵⁵

This colourful portrayal is clearly an exoticised view on the part of Holroyd, and

⁵² Pushkin, p.4.

⁵³ Michael Holroyd: *Augustus John* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), p.103.

⁵⁴ Augustus John: Letter to John Rothenstein (14 May 1952), cited in Holroyd, p.27.

⁵⁵ Holroyd, p.104.

John's interest in the Roma certainly seems to conform to this kind of perspective. Although he pursued his fascination so far as to purchase a traditional Romani wagon and horse, in which he travelled with his family for some time, the death of his wife in 1907 persuaded him to abandon the nomadic lifestyle. Presumably the reality of living on the road was less appealing than the romantic 'gypsy' stereotype. George Borrow's nomadic period was also short term, as Willems (who engages with his subject more soberly than Holroyd does with John) stresses:

In accounts which have contributed to Borrow's image, this period regularly becomes blown up into years of living among vagrants and Gypsies where, as a tinker, he was the cynosure of a romantic universe, discovering fresh adventure around every bend of the road. If we accept the time span, presented in his semi-autobiographical fiction, however, then it adds up to no more than about three months.⁵⁶

The Romany Rye concludes with Borrow being approached by a recruiting sergeant who tries to persuade him to serve in India. Having been quoted some of the language the sergeant has heard there, Borrow espies a connection with Romani and determines to travel there, where he presumably hopes to uncover the origins of the Roma.⁵⁷ It is unlikely that he ever made his journey, although while working for the Bible Society, he did travel to Russia and also Spain, where he continued his studies.

Popular texts like *Wuthering Heights* and *Carmen* continue to be consumed today, and the image of the 'gypsy' that they present barely differs from the contemporary 'gypsy' figure. The way that the Romani people are portrayed in the media and in textual representations generally retains characteristics such as the desire for freedom, exotic beauty, dishonesty and savagery. References to 'gypsy' fashion are more common than reports of the issues facing Romani people; the consensus seems to be that the reality of being Romani is far less interesting and

⁵⁶ Willems, p.100.

⁵⁷ George Borrow: *The Romany Rye* (London: J. M. Dent, 1949), p.309.

attractive than the mythology of the 'gypsy'. A reaction to these stereotypes has yet to occur. While some Roma Rights activists have attempted to de-mythologise the Roma and reclaim their culture, setting out the elements that are correct and placing them within their proper context, there remains much work to be done. Accurate textual portrayals that might serve to rectify earlier misrepresentations are few in number, but are starting to appear more frequently. Amongst the more widely circulated examples are Alexander Ramati's *And the Violins Stopped Playing* (1985) and Ronald Lee's *Goddam Gypsy* (1971).

Although accounts written by Romani people are now more widely available, they remain far less accessible in the West than texts by non-Roma. As we have seen, there is a lengthy history of misrepresentation that has been perpetuated in part by textual portrayals. More recently, there have been numerous studies and ethnographies that attempt to provide a more accurate representation of the Roma. However, some of the more popular texts are not without their flaws; there is in particular a tendency towards generalisation, with some authors ascribing qualities they have observed in certain Romani people or groups to all Roma. An example is Isabel Fonseca's book *Bury Me Standing*, a study of Romani culture based on her experiences of Roma throughout Eastern Europe. While she focuses on the realities, rather than being drawn to music and magic, Fonseca does have a tendency to generalise, stating, for instance, that 'Gypsies lie. They lie a lot – more often and more inventively than other people.'⁵⁸ Garth Cartwright's *Princes Amongst Men* is a comparable text, although this book is specifically concerned with Romani musicians. Cartwright does aim to keep stereotyping and exoticism to a minimum, and his book is a useful source on Romani music, but there is nonetheless a degree of romanticism. In the opening chapter, for example, he writes, 'Gypsies. Fire. Like bread and butter, politicians and lies, you sense they instinctively go together.'⁵⁹ In addition, the fact that the heart of the book's subject matter is music poses a problem. Music is a crucial part of the 'gypsy' figure beloved of non-Roma, and therefore any accounts of Roma who play music risk perpetuating that stereotype. This is something that Gogol Bordello also have to negotiate, and which has an impact on the way we should

⁵⁸ Isabel Fonseca: *Bury Me Standing* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.15.

⁵⁹ Garth Cartwright: *Princes Amongst Men* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), p.4.

understand the term 'gypsy' in Gypsy Punk.

PERFORMING THE 'GYPSY' AND NOMADIC FORCES

Although the 'gypsy' figure that I have examined is by no means a true representation of the Romani people, collisions between Roma and 'gypsy' do occur. One such collision can be seen in the work of Gogol Bordello: their Gypsy Punk music places them into the dichotomy between the accurate representation of the Romani people and the marketability of the 'gypsy' figure. Although Gogol Bordello display what seems to be a genuine interest in the issues facing Romani people, and are supportive of Roma Rights, they have designated themselves a Gypsy Punk band, perhaps indicating a desire to conform to audiences' expectations of the term 'gypsy' rather than an attempt to provide an alternative perspective on the Roma and their music. In order to understand Gogol Bordello's involvement with the Roma and their engagement with the 'gypsy' figure I will now consider their relationship to each.

None of Gogol Bordello are Roma themselves, though Hütz has a Romani grandparent and can thus legitimately claim some Romani identity. He has described how he has been able to further his migratory movements as a result of his ancestry; for example, he has said, 'I do utilise the Global Network of Gypsy Sofas to stay places.'⁶⁰ He has also remarked in numerous interviews that when he moved to Rio de Janeiro in 2008, he was able to quickly associate himself with the Romani community in Brazil, implying that it was easier for him to settle there due to his connections. Discussing his move from Eastern Europe to America and then to Brazil, he has said, 'It just amazes me [that] everywhere I go I wind up hanging with family. We all know the same songs, different dialect but essentially the same language.'⁶¹ This statement suggests a diasporic community that can transcend borders, and which does not require a national identity, and indeed, this is one way of considering Romani identity.

⁶⁰ 'A Round with Gogol Bordello's Eugene Hütz', *Q Magazine*, April 2008, p.30.

⁶¹ Julie Garisto: 'Gogol Bordello's Eugene Hütz talks gypsy rock, recording with Rick Rubin', *Tampa Bay Times*, 23 July 2009 <<http://blogs.tampabay.com/tbt/2009/07/gogol-bordellos-eugene-hutz-talks-gypsy-rock-recording-with-rick-rubin.html>>

Romani identity is sometimes defined through the concept of *romanipen*, which refers to the state of being Roma. The word 'gypsyhood' has sometimes been used as a synonym, or translation, for this term, but it in fact has deeper connotations than this might suggest; Lech Mróz succinctly defines it as 'the fundamental norms of the Romani way of life and cultural identity'.⁶² Hancock has considered *romanipen* as a substitute for a homeland or nation state; Romani identity may thus be comparable with the national identity of non-Roma:

It is important to emphasize the aspects of Romani identity discussed here because in the absence of a political homeland, and with the population so widely spread around the globe, it is the sense of "us and them", and everything which rationalizes it, which has served as the principal cohesive factor; in a sense, *řomanipé* may be seen as the Gypsies' transportable homeland.⁶³

So the concept of *romanipen* can be seen as embodying the sense of a unified Romani people; as Hancock says, it provides a sense of community in spite of the globally scattered condition of the Romani population. Yet less relevant – and even falsely ascribed – features of their culture are seen as stronger defining elements by many non-Roma. Although nomadism is not widespread amongst Roma, for example, their lack of a distinct national identity as Roma means that they are still frequently perceived as a wandering race. In addition, some writers have suggested that Romani identity is not always something that is inherent. In his ethnographic research in a Hungarian Roma community, Michael Stewart observed that 'it was possible to be born a *gažo* [non-Roma] and become a Rom. Among the Rom of Harangos and nearby villages, there were several such people. [...] I never heard it suggested that because of their non-Gypsy ancestry, these people were somehow less Rom than anyone else.'⁶⁴ This suggests that the parameters of *romanipen* – in which non-Roma are typically regarded as impure – are fluid, and

⁶² Lech Mróz: 'Poland: the clash of tradition and modernity', Will Guy (ed.): *Between past and future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), p.254.

⁶³ Ian Hancock: 'The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism', David Crowe and John Kolsti: *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), p.137.

⁶⁴ Michael Stewart: *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p.58.

that it is possible for non-Roma to overcome racial barriers and to be regarded as culturally Romani.

Gogol Bordello have not attempted to 'become' Roma: when Hütz identifies as Roma he evidently regards this as an inherent state rather than an adopted identity, and his non-Roma colleagues have never described themselves as Roma or 'gypsy'. However, they have not escaped criticism with regards to their handling of Roma and 'gypsy' identities. Although they maintain an active engagement with Romani issues, for example, visiting and playing in the Turkish Roma settlement Sulukule, which is threatened with re-development, they have been accused entering into the exoticising discourse that misrepresents Romani culture. Garth Cartwright, who has championed Balkan and 'gypsy' music extensively, makes this point as part of his criticism:

None of Gogol Bordello is Roma – although the band leader Eugene Hütz occasionally likes to claim he is – and their music remains more akin to a fiddle-driven Sham 69 than an Eastern Bloc Clash. But they have great energy and project a colourful chaos not unlike that in [Emir] Kusturica's films, one that skims the surface of Balkan Roma culture without touching on its artistry or struggle, so that it may revive several stale Gypsy clichés (wild, freewheeling, violent etc).⁶⁵

Cartwright has admitted his dislike for Gogol Bordello and is not writing from an academic standpoint, but even allowing for his personal bias, there are some problems in this statement. Firstly, Cartwright's point that Hütz sometimes claims that he is Roma suggests that Hütz attempts to 'become' Roma, when this is not the case. Additionally, it is incorrect to describe the stereotypical view that 'gypsies' are wild or violent as 'stale Gypsy clichés'; as we seen, contemporary portrayals in the media and elsewhere perpetuate such attitudes. However, the suggestion that Gogol Bordello might also perpetuate these stereotypes is certainly valid. Cartwright contrasts Gogol Bordello with the Serbian band Kal, whose blending of

⁶⁵ Garth Cartwright: 'Blowing up a storm', *The Independent*, 5 May 2006, Arts & Books Review, p.3.

traditional melodies and a rock framework means that they can also be described as Gypsy Punk. 'Unlike Gogol Bordello, Kal [...] are more than pure spectacle, and they spit indignation at being called "Gypsy". "I'm a Roma," says the band's leader and vocalist Dragan Ristić. "Gypsy is pejorative, a misnomer. We've always called ourselves Roms, so I find it distasteful to be called a Gypsy.'"⁶⁶

Cartwright's intimation that Gogol Bordello are 'pure spectacle' is particularly interesting, as they are certainly a highly visual band, well known for their colourful and energetic performances. It might therefore seem that the figure of the 'gypsy' as it appears in Gogol Bordello's work is something that is performed. We have already seen attempts at adopting 'gypsy' identity in the cases of George Borrow and Augustus John, but Hütz's performance of the 'gypsy' is quite different. Further examination will require engagement with the concept of racial passing, which describes an individual passing themselves off as a person of another race. The discourse of passing generally involves people from oppressed or minority racial groups, who seek to escape oppression or improve their status by claiming a new racial identity.⁶⁷ It is far less common for someone from a dominant group to engage in passing, but incidences of people passing as Roma or 'gypsy' are relatively numerous. In addition to Borrow and John, there is the example of the Irish Walter Starkie, an Irish academic, who travelled to Romania in 1929 posing as a Romani musician.⁶⁸ Hütz often identifies as Roma or 'gypsy' (using these words interchangeably), boasting that his ties to the race mean he will be welcomed in any Roma community anywhere in the world. Being a Rom himself, he does not need to pass as Roma.

For a Gypsy Punk musician, however, being Roma is perhaps less important than being 'gypsy'. A Gypsy Punk band like Kal, who draw closely on the culture and music of the Roma based on their own experiences as Romani people, and who use exclusively the term 'Roma' will receive less popular attention than a band like Gogol Bordello, who present more familiar images and ideas, even though these idea may not necessarily be accurate. This explains Hütz's need to perform 'gypsy'

⁶⁶ Cartwright: 'Blowing up a storm', p.3.

⁶⁷ See Elaine K. Ginsberg: 'Introduction: The Politics of Passing', Elaine K. Ginsberg (ed.): *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) for an overview of passing.

⁶⁸ See Susan Williams: 'The "Civilized Trap" of Modernity and Romanian Roma, 1918-1934', *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2007), pp.12-27.

identity. In order to ensure that they will be embraced by a broad audience, Gogol Bordello perform qualities associated with the stereotypical 'gypsy' figure. Their flamboyant sense of style and their dramatic performances, during which there is a sense that all control might be lost, act as signifiers of 'gypsiness'; combined with their self-appellation as a Gypsy Punk band this renders them 'gypsy' and causes them to seem exotic and appealing. Writing about the idea of the stranger, Sara Ahmed has noted that 'The alien stranger is [...] not beyond human, but a mechanism *for allowing us to face that which we have already designated as the beyond*.'⁶⁹ This observation can be applied to the distinction between Roma and 'gypsy': the Roma have been regarded as 'beyond' by many non-Roma, and the figure of the 'gypsy' acts as a conduit through which the 'beyond' is filtered. In performing the 'gypsy' in Gogol Bordello's music and performance, Hütz acts as an intermediary between the 'gypsy' other and the non-Romani audience. In Ahmed's terms, he appears as a stranger, through whom it is possible to face the Roma.

Hütz is an interesting figure in that he has both Romani ethnicity and the performed identity of the 'gypsy'. He has described how 'My parents didn't want to be part of the Gypsy thing because of the baggage that it implies. They fully internalised the shame associated with being a Gypsy.'⁷⁰ However, Hütz has been able to escape this shame, in part through his performance of 'gypsy' identity. When he appears with Gogol Bordello, the negative connotations associated with the 'gypsy' figure – stereotypes of dirt and criminality – are offset by persistent associations with the exotic and the exciting. Ahmed has written that 'Consumer culture provides consumers with the fantasy that they can become the stranger, however temporarily, or that they can be like the stranger, by using certain products or by eating their food.'⁷¹ To this we might add: or by listening to their music. Hütz offers consumers of Gypsy Punk the opportunity to become the 'gypsy' stranger through his music and performance. Of course, this is not without its problems. According to Ahmed:

⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed: *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.3.

⁷⁰ 'A Round with Gogol Bordello's Eugene Hütz', p.30.

⁷¹ Ahmed, p.119.

What is clear in the narratives offered of consuming, passing and becoming is the reduction of the stranger to the level of being, and the association of being with the body: hence to consume, become or pass as the stranger is always to pass through, or move through, the stranger's body. The very techniques of consuming, becoming and passing are informed by access to cultural capital and knowledges embedded in colonial and class privilege which give the dominant subject the ability to move and in which 'the stranger' is assumed to be *knowable, seeable and be-able*.⁷²

When non-Roma seek to become or pass as 'gypsy', they presume that they have come to understand the condition of being Roma. In most cases, however, they have not understood the Roma but the 'gypsy' stereotype. In the nineteenth century George Borrow felt that by taking on a nomadic existence and learning to speak Romani he could become 'gypsy'; Gypsy Punk reaches out to a contemporary audience who hope to become 'gypsy' by dressing in flamboyant clothing and listening to a particular kind of music. Gogol Bordello inarguably utilise the exotic connotations of the 'gypsy'. Hütz has said in one interview, 'When you talk to gypsyologists they will always try to downplay the romantic side of the stereotype [...]. But even if you downplay it, it will still be a hundred times more romantic than being a regular motherf_____ [sic].'⁷³ However, it should be remembered the Romani people do not have the ability to choose to be 'gypsy'; instead they are branded as 'gypsies' by many non-Roma, and have to bear all of the associations carried by that term.

As musicians who draw on 'gypsy' music influences and support Roma Rights, Gogol Bordello have in their music a vessel for presenting an accurate representation of the Roma. Yet, as we have seen, their performance of the 'gypsy' figure risks propagating stereotypes. Carol Silverman notes that 'Eugene Hütz is such a polarizing figure in the United States that Romani activists find him hard to

⁷² Ahmed, p.133.

⁷³ Hugh Porter: 'Immigrant Punk: Eugene Hütz', *Time Magazine*, 13 August 2008
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1832321,00.html>>

dismiss, even while they criticize his stereotypical displays. They hope that perhaps his fame can be recruited for activism.⁷⁴ A number of Gogol Bordello's songs distance them from stereotypes, but for a band that define themselves as Gypsy Punk, they have included far fewer references to the Roma in their work than we might expect. It was not until the 2010 album *Trans-Continental Hustle* that Romani issues were foregrounded; this album includes 'Pala Tute', which is based on a traditional Romani song, and two tracks, 'Break the Spell' and 'Trans-Continental Hustle', which directly engage with the Roma.

'Break the Spell', which was originally recorded by J.U.F., the dub-inflected side project of some of Gogol Bordello's members, is their most outspoken statement about Roma Rights. This song references such issues as the practice of sending Romani children to schools for the disabled, widespread in parts of Eastern Europe, and the fact that the Roma are accepted as musicians and entertainers but otherwise resented. The objective here seems to be to debunk exoticised versions of Romani culture and to provide detail about the harsher realities of being Roma. This means that Gogol Bordello cannot be described as entirely guilty of perpetuating false perceptions about the Roma. Hütz's genuine interest in his Romani ethnicity and the issues facing Romani people today clearly comes across here. However, this does not continue into *Trans-Continental Hustle*'s title track, which follows immediately after 'Break the Spell' on the record. In this song, we find a mythologised version of Romani history, which uses to its advantage the lack of information that most listeners have about the subject matter. The fact that there is no definite consensus about the origins of the Roma, despite strong evidence that points towards an Indian origin, means that in 'Trans-Continental Hustle' the potential for mythologising is great. Here, Hütz sings:

Old schools they were just nomadic forces
Kill all the men, steal all the women and the horses
Then later on moved on to the pursuit of spices
And finally the rest of all the vices.
But in the wake of the trans-continental hustle

⁷⁴ Carol Silverman: *Romani Routes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.287.

Governing clock it went up in flames
And by the time we build up the muscle
There was no time or space left to claim.

Although Hütz may not intend to adopt any particular school of thought regarding the origins of the Roma with these lyrics, they adhere roughly to the arguments propounded by the likes of Hancock and Lee, describing the Roma as a nomadic warrior caste. The suggestion that they were unable to acquire any territory of their own, which is presumably intended to explain their continuing nomadism and lack of national territory, seems plausible, and is certainly an appealing story. Although there is a risk of propagating false perceptions here, there is enough truth (or at least, enough of what most scholars regard as the truth) in the myth that any untrue impressions are relegated to the background. What is interesting about this song is that while the Roma are brought much closer to the fore than they have been in most of Gogol Bordello's previous lyrics, the music that accompanies this is moving increasingly away from the styles that are most associated with 'gypsies' and towards Latin American styles. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it reminds us that 'gypsy music' need not be confined to the sounds that might initially come to mind when the term is invoked – typically violins, accordions and minor chord progressions. Secondly, and following on from this, it encourages listeners to seek out other styles of music, which are not necessarily connected directly with 'gypsies', and to investigate other areas of Romani music and culture.

The idea of the Romani people as 'nomadic forces' is also interesting, particularly if we return to Deleuze and Guattari, and their notion of nomadology. They point out that the State seeks to oppress nomadic groups⁷⁵; it is as a result of such oppression that the Roma of 'Trans-Continental Hustle' are left with neither time nor space. But these Roma are not only 'nomadic' but also 'forces', which might imply that they have the means to overcome oppression. Deleuze and Guattari empower nomadology with the idea of the war machine, saying, 'The nomads invented a war machine in opposition to the State apparatus. [...] It is an

⁷⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p.425

assemblage that makes thought itself nomadic.’⁷⁶ However, they point out that ‘war is neither the condition nor the object of the war machine, but necessarily accompanies or completes it’.⁷⁷ They go on to say that the war machine takes war as its object once it has been appropriated by the State. Similarly, when Romani identity is appropriated by non-Roma, aspects of it are given different connotations, and it is in this way that false perceptions about the Roma come about.

We have considered how Hütz has Romani ethnicity but also performs a ‘gypsy’ identity. The ‘nomadic forces’ of ‘Trans-Continental Hustle’ also have elements of both Roma and ‘gypsy’: they have the associations of vice and the travelling lifestyle of the much maligned ‘gypsy’ figure, but also the empowerment and sense of origin that is absent from representations of ‘gypsies’ yet part of the culture of the Roma. One frequent misrepresentation is that the Roma do not have a sense of history.⁷⁸ This has surely contributed to the exoticism that continues to be a feature of representations of the Roma: without a history of their own, they are susceptible to having myths created on their behalf. In performing the ‘gypsy’ figure within the Gypsy Punk genre, Gogol Bordello might seem to be engaged in this kind of vicarious myth-making, and it is certainly the case that they interact with pre-existing myths to create a new mythology for Gypsy Punk. The crucial question is whether this mythology is created at the expense of the Roma. The band’s forays into activism might suggest that this is not the case, but the fact that their outward focus is on music and colourful presentation means that it is difficult for them to completely avoid exoticising the Roma. However, the myth that Gogol Bordello construct maintains enough distance between Roma and ‘gypsy’ and thus does not reduce the Romani people to a romantic stereotype.

⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p.27.

⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, p.460.

⁷⁸ See Barany, p.205 and Fonseca, p.243 for examples of this.

CHAPTER TWO:

Eugene Hütz and the Béla Bartóks: ‘gypsy’ music in Gypsy Punk

BUDAPEST, APRIL 2008

Gogol Bordello usually conclude their live sets with a song called ‘Baro Foro’. The title translates as ‘big city’ and the song’s lyrics are written in a mixture of English and Romani, which Eugene Hütz claims is ‘all I could afford at the time of writing’. He adds, with his characteristic level of modesty, that ‘the idea was to write not a national anthem, but a song of all times and all nations, the kind of shit they put into Vijager [sic] for other civilizations to check out’¹. The song is dominated by an insistent violin riff, which memorably intercedes after a false ending a third of the way through. The album version clocks in at nine minutes long, but when played live it is extended; frequently the band segue into another track, ‘Undestructable’, before the violin’s re-entry signals the return to ‘Baro Foro’. At Gogol Bordello’s spring 2008 gig at Petőfi Csarnok in Budapest, the finale was more elaborate: in addition to ‘Undestructable’, a further three songs were incorporated.

After the show, the band and crew were winding down backstage, as usual. As is often the case, their dressing room was a shambolic looking place, furnished with mismatched chairs, and tables laden with food and drink. The place had an untidy sense of impermanence. Gogol Bordello could be regarded as ‘gypsy’ simply because of the nomadic lifestyle that their constant touring demands. This is a lifestyle now foreign to most Roma, but for Gogol Bordello both work and play move with them from place to place: the mood backstage is somewhere between party and workplace. In Budapest, roadies were already moving kit around,

¹ Eugene Hütz: ‘Call Your Best Friend Let’s Take Him With Us’, *Gogol Bordello website* <<http://gogolbordello.com/hutzovina/barofofo/>>

packing away gear in preparation for the next night's gig in Bratislava. The band were engaged with mundane activities such as eating dinner and signing promotional material, but there was a celebratory mood and an abundance of alcohol. It was 8 April, the International Day of the Roma, and the consensus seemed to be that the gig had been a particular success; as a result everyone was spirited and chatty. Hütz in particular seemed pleased to be receiving favourable comments about the setlist.

'Nice medley, at the end there,' someone said.

'It wasn't a medley,' Hütz protested.

'Mash-up, then,' I offered.

'It's not a mash-up; it's a No Compromise Sound System. When we're playing new material, people are always asking to hear the old songs: "Where is the 'Sally'? Where is the 'Bordello Kind of Guy'?" So this is a way of including the old songs; it's a No Compromise Sound System.'

His insistence that Gogol Bordello do not compromise reminded me of the manifesto that stressed the importance of being 'authentic'. And Hütz's attitude to the setlist certainly shows that they have something in common with the Romani musicians who have informed their work: they like to play songs that their audiences know and want to hear. When the band had finished signing photographs and packed away their instruments, Hütz told me that there were plans to move on: 'We're going to a gypsy music club.' I knew that Hungary has a sizeable Romani population, but I had as yet seen no signs of 'gypsy' music. One restaurant that claimed to offer it turned out to have as its house band nothing more than a string quartet playing jaunty tunes. I hoped that this 'gypsy music club' would provide a more authentic music – but I could not necessarily have described what an authentic 'gypsy' music should sound like.

It took a while to move everyone outside and gather them together there, but once this had been achieved, we were shepherded into taxis and driven into the centre of Budapest. Our cab stopped in the Erzsébet Square in the middle of the city. The club was partially subterranean, cut into the concrete of the square, and heading down into the place I was struck by how conventional it seemed. Everything was finished in glass, steel and neon – hardly unusual in any nightclub,

but the suggestion of a 'gypsy music club' had made me expect a less polished atmosphere. There seemed to be nothing 'gypsy' about the music either – in fact, there were no musicians, only a DJ hunched over his MacBook, playing indie and dance music. However, the atmosphere soon changed when the DJ shut down his computer and a group of musicians took to the stage to play on guitar, violin, accordion and spoons. It was at this point that the glass and steel construction became a 'gypsy music club'. The Romani musicians were soon joined on stage by Hütz and some of his colleagues, who jammed along to traditional songs and added some of their own material.

It was only when I returned to London and watched the inevitable YouTube videos of the performance that I learned that the Romani musicians had been members of the Hungarian group Romano Drom. I had heard of Romano Drom, but I did not know enough about them that I recognised them in Budapest. The members of this band are from the Olah group of Roma, whose musicians 'traditionally don't use any instruments apart from domestic utensils, such as water cans, wooden spoons or any other percussion implement. The prime instrument however is the voice'.² This sound has been augmented with other instruments – Romano Drom use guitars, violin and accordion – but the voice remains dominant. On this occasion in Budapest, the addition of Gypsy Punk musicians changed the sound further. Hütz's English-language vocals were an obvious bastardisation, for example, but his delivery of these lyrics was not too far removed from the Olah style.

The Roma have been regarded very highly as musicians for centuries;³ indeed, musicianship is one the qualities most immediately associated with them, and is often considered a positive counterpart to their falsely perceived dirtiness and criminality. Gypsy Punk is perhaps the most recent manifestation of 'gypsy' music to have emerged, but 'gypsy' music is certainly not a new form. The type of music that the Roma have played may have changed over time, with influences continually being picked up from the areas in which musicians have resided and

² 'Romano Drom', *National Geographic Music*

<http://worldmusic.nationalgeographic.com/view/page.basic/artist/content.artist/romano_drom_3830/en_US>

³ See Angus Fraser: *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.110 for citations concerning gypsy musicians from as far back as the fifteenth century.

the songs that they have heard. However, defining what 'gypsy' music actually is poses problems: for example, is the more stripped down form of music that I heard Romano Drom play in Budapest any more 'gypsy' than the Gypsy Punk I had heard earlier that night? The difficulty is that there are so many variations of 'gypsy' music, and the fact that a single 'gypsy' music genre is conceivable has more to do with the people who play it than with the way it sounds. Before establishing the place of Gypsy Punk in the field of 'gypsy' music, it is therefore necessary to determine what constitutes 'gypsy' music, and I will attempt to do so in this chapter. I will begin by examining the form of Balkan Beats, which has emerged contemporaneously with Gypsy Punk, before considering the history of the term 'gypsy music' and its use as a marketing term today. Ultimately I will determine the extent to which Gogol Bordello are producing a 'gypsy' music and a Romani music.

BALKAN BEATS: A CONTEMPORARY 'GYPSY' MUSIC?

While Gypsy Punk was beginning to coagulate in New York, something with a different sound but with a comparable cultural position was coming together in clubs in Europe. The specific site where this new form was birthed was a city that, like the Balkans, has a history of straddling East and West. However, while the Balkans are regarded as having provided a bridge between the civilisation of Europe and the 'other' of Asia, Berlin was a divided city split between the capitalist West and communist Eastern Europe. Berlin (the city's West, at least) was a haven of counterculture even before the wall that divided it had fallen, and once Germany had been unified and, on a larger scale, the Eastern and Western sides of Europe had been drawn closer, this counterculture was in strong position to grow. While the Lower East Side was the centre of New York's punk scene, its German equivalent was the district of Kreuzberg, an area of Berlin with a similar history as a centre in which immigrants settled. In common with the Lower East Side, there was a strong Jewish tradition, but while the New York district later became home to many Russians and Eastern Europeans, the next wave of immigration in Kreuzberg was primarily Turkish. Accordingly, these two areas could between

them be said to have an almost Balkan population.

One migrant to Kreuzberg was a Bosnian named Robert Soko, who moved to Berlin in 1990, and began to frequent a punk bar called the Arcanoa. It was there that he began to stage the parties that grew into the Balkan Beats scene. He played Balkan music and held events on socialist holidays, creating an ironic nostalgia for the recently concluded communist period of the Balkans' history.⁴ The biography produced by Soko's label, Piranha, states that he began playing Balkan rather than Western music because of 'two figures, [... Goran] Bregović who revamped Balkan Gypsy melodies, making Balkan music palatable for a Western audience, and [Emir] Kusturica, for whose Gypsy inspired films Bregović did the soundtracks.'⁵ Although Soko is not Roma himself, this is an indicator that, like many Romani musicians, he was now setting out to play for an audience of which he was not culturally a part. There is a well-established precedent of Romani musicians acting as hired performers for non-Roma and, as we have seen in the case of Hütz, the Eastern European based in the West occupies a similar position; he is able to reinvent the East in order to appeal to his audience. While Soko might have been reluctant to play unadulterated, or perhaps even authentic, Balkan music, he was able to court success with music that took elements from the exoticised cultures of 'gypsies' and the Balkans but slotted neatly into the West's idea of how such music ought to sound. Balkan Beats thus adapts 'gypsy' music so that it is underpinned by the persistent beats heard in clubs; the basslines are pumped out by horns playing in the style of Balkan brass bands, while the melodies played on accordion and violin offer an appealing alternative to the repetition of techno.

Balkan Beats has grown quickly; numerous compilation albums have been released and club nights catering to the style take place all over Europe. It is events like these that are marketed as 'Balkan' or 'gypsy' nights, where audiences are encouraged, in a clear manifestation of balkanism, to wear false moustaches and adopt a 'gypsy' fashion. Having drawn on 'gypsy' music and dance music, Balkan Beats is also becoming influential on its own terms: it is no longer produced

⁴ 'Robert Soko: Biography', *Piranha Musik*

<http://www.piranha.de/english/piranha_musik_verlag/robert_soko>

⁵ 'Robert Soko: Biography'

only by niche DJs who perform to a narrow audience. Felix Buxton of popular house act Basement Jaxx has remixed several tracks by Romani musicians, and has released Balkan Beats compilations on their label, Atlantic Jaxx. In addition, the 2007 Basement Jaxx single 'Hey U' sampled Romanian brass band Fanfare Ciocărlia's song 'Asfalt Tango'. While the consumers of this music may be not necessarily be aware of the nature of its source material, this is an example of a form of music usually regarded as the specialised product of 'gypsy' music being injected into popular culture through the medium of Balkan Beats.

One of the biggest names in Balkan Beats is Stefan Hantel, who performs under the name Shantel. Born in Germany, and formerly a techno DJ, he developed an enthusiasm for Balkan music after he visited the Bucovina region of Eastern Romania, where his family has roots. This area is very close to the Carpathian region of Ukraine, and a similarity can be drawn between Shantel and Eugene Hütz in their discoveries of 'gypsy' music; perhaps the main differences between them is that while Hütz came to 'gypsy' music having previously been a punk fan, Shantel had been engaged with dance music. Another difference is that while Hütz primarily plays music of his own composition, Shantel began his Balkan Beats career remixing Romani bands such as Mahala Raï Banda and Fanfare Ciocărlia and still often covers traditional Romani songs when playing in concert. It is perhaps for this reason that he is an unpopular figure with Gogol Bordello, who write on their website that at one point in their history, 'Gogol Bordello, along with Fanfare Ciocărlia, Taraf de Haïdouks and other most progressive Gypsy bands of Europe, get exploited by Shantel for corrupted yuppie-catores [sic] Bukovina project, but cleverly breaks the ties...'⁶

However, the music and performance of Hütz and Shantel are certainly comparable. While Shantel is a far more restrained performer than Hütz, he is similar in that he fronts and directs a multi-ethnic group of musicians, the Bucovina Club Orkestar, who play in a style that is informed by Romani music. Despite his background as a DJ, Shantel acts as a frontman in his concerts, singing and playing guitar. He and his band are joined on stage by two female backing singers: this makes his lineup look all the more like Gogol Bordello's, and it is easy

⁶ 'A Brief History of Gogol Bordello', *Gogol Bordello website* <<http://gogolbordello.com/immi-punks/abriefhistory/>>

to see why Hütz might feel affronted. But the accusation of exploitation seems unfounded and almost spiteful, given that there is a common ground of influence between the two acts. Hütz also seems confused about audience; while Gogol Bordello may be playing to an ostensibly more working-class crowd of punk fans, to accuse Shantel of playing for yuppies only puts him on the same stage as the 'progressive Gypsy bands of Europe', whose audiences are primarily Western and middle-class.⁷

A more balanced and impartial critique of Shantel comes from Ioana Szeman, who has examined his work with reference to the Roma and the Balkans, stating that his songs 'orientalize the Balkans from within, erasing the Roma'⁸. Her primary example is the title track from his 2007 album *Disko Partizani*, whose lyrics 'literally suggest that by becoming Gypsy (*țigan*) one can reach the "exotic Orient"⁹. This song includes the repeated lyric 'Țiganizația', which means 'gypsification', and continues with the statement, 'this is what you need'. Szeman says that 'While Shantel may be delivering for diasporic and migrant audiences a sense of Balkan cosmopolitanism, what is troubling is what "gypsification" has come to mean in this song specifically, and in the branding of "Gypsy music" more generally.'¹⁰ When the characteristics of the Roma are used by non-gypsy musicians, she argues, the Roma themselves are made redundant.

Shantel's appropriation of 'gypsy' and Balkan identities has continued in his 2009 album *Planet Paprika*, the follow up to *Disko Partizani*. The title track puts Shantel among those writers who have created imaginary Balkan homelands, with lyrics in which he sings, 'Some say that I come from Russia / Some think that I come from Africa / But I'm so exotic, I'm so erotic / 'Cause I come from the Planet Paprika.' As a citizen of Planet Paprika, Shantel is alien in every sense of the word – the first line of the song is 'I came on my spaceship to save the Earth'. Planet Paprika is literally intended as another world, but the identity of Shantel's intergalactic superhero of globalisation is made to be East European: his homeland

⁷ For audience demographics see Carol Silverman: 'Trafficking in the Exotic with "Gypsy" Music: Balkan Roma, Cosmopolitanism, and "World Music" Festivals, Donna A. Buchanan (ed.): *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene*, p.348.

⁸ Ioana Szeman: "'Gypsy Music" and Deejays: Orientalism, Balkanism and Romani Musicians, *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Fall 2009), p.100.

⁹ Szeman, p.100.

¹⁰ Szeman, p.114.

is named after the spice associated with Hungarian cooking and his theme song is Balkan in its style. He declares himself to be in addition, 'An ultimate kitsch of the people of the world', and, as Szeman has observed, it is in being kitsch that Shantel 'gypsifies' himself.¹¹ Despite this, he professes not to consider that he is playing 'gypsy' music at all: "'There is no music called Gypsy music," insists DJ Shantel. "You can only talk about traditional music from different regions in south-eastern Europe."¹² This is an established line of argument, as we will go on to see, but the direct references to 'gypsies' in his work, and his appropriation of Romani music, suggests that he is well aware that there is much to be gained through use of the 'gypsy' image.

Although Balkan Beats is a genre from outside the Balkans, it is comparable with styles of music from within the region. Shantel is in fact influenced by the Romanian form *manele*, which Cristina Morosa has described as:

a musical genre that mixes the local Gypsy and oriental beats with cheap synthesizers in explicit, bad grammar songs about love, sex, money and enemies. It is an urban 'dirty' popular music closely related to the Bulgarian *changa* and the Serbian turbo folk and it is played exclusively at the moment by interpreters of Roma origin.¹³

Manele is an indigenous product made in the Balkans for a Balkan audience, and it is primarily produced by Romani musicians. However, its origins lie with the Ottoman Empire (perhaps it is no coincidence that Shantel is particularly popular in Turkey, having achieved a number one album there with *Planet Paprika*). Discussing *manele* (which she terms *muzică orientală*), Margaret H. Beissinger writes, 'we are speaking of a genre that is rooted in Romania's Ottoman-dominated past and was adopted by *lăutari* [professional Romani musicians], later becoming

¹¹ Szeman, p.113.

¹² Dorian Lynskey: 'There is no such thing as Gypsy music', *The Guardian*, 24 November 2006, Features p.5.

¹³ Cristina Morosa: 'Manele the new Balkan reggaeton', *The Bridge*, Issue 8 (Q1/2008) <http://www.bridge-mag.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=381:manele-the-new-balkan-reggaeton&catid=29:culture2008&Itemid=34>

an urban Romani song and dance and eventually evolving into today's *muzică orientală*.¹⁴ She adds that '[Western musical trends], too, have profoundly affected *muzică orientală*. Rock and disco have long been exploited in this style and there has been experimentation with rap as well.'¹⁵ This marks a continuation of the two-way exchange of musical styles that has gone on between Romani musicians and those of the regions in which they have settled. Manele has been influenced by Ottoman music, has gone on to inform Balkan Beats in Western Europe, and has also taken on rap and hip-hop influences. The difference between this evolution and that of earlier 'gypsy' music is that Romani musicians now no longer have to travel to a particular region to hear its music. Due to the increased availability of recordings, which has come about as a result of technological developments and the end of communist control of music consumption, Romanian Roma have been able to listen to and draw upon hip-hop from New York or Los Angeles without ever leaving the Balkans. Equally, the fact that musicians in the West have had increased access to Balkan music has no doubt contributed to the development of Gypsy Punk.

Manele is controversial in Romania; although it has a wide following, there are also many detractors. Beissinger explains its ambiguous reception with reference to its context as a 'gypsy' form of music:

[B]ecause the [Romani] music and dance were, during the communist years, part of a counterculture, they still have a slightly subversive aura. To engage in formerly taboo, erotic Romani dance is exhilarating and liberating for many Romanians; it combines the allure of the sexy and forbidden with the romance of an imagined "Gypsy" culture.¹⁶

This appeal of subversion is very similar to the allure that is associated with 'gypsy' music in the West, of which Balkan Beats is just one manifestation. For

¹⁴ Margaret H. Beissinger: '*Muzică Orientală: Identity and Popular Culture in Postcommunist Romania*', Donna A Buchanan (ed.): *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), p.101.

¹⁵ Beissinger, p.117

¹⁶ Beissinger, p.130.

Western consumers of Balkan Beats, there is not only 'the romance of an imagined "Gypsy" culture', but also that of an imagined Balkans, and the same appeal is apparent in Gypsy Punk. What is significant about the Balkan Beats genre specifically is that it allows us to see that the same discourses are at play in both Berlin and Bucharest. Crucially, it proves that we are not only dealing with an orientalist, or even balkanist, dichotomy of east and west, but also with a dichotomy of Roma and non-Roma. Of course, while 'gypsy' music in the Balkans is only subject to the latter of these distinctions, 'gypsy' music played by East Europeans in the West is tied up with both. In the Balkans, where there are much larger Roma populations than in Western Europe, 'gypsies' are seen a slightly different way but, as is the case in the West, they represent a less civilised East. As Szeman has pointed out, in contemporary 'gypsy' music aimed at Western audiences 'Gypsies are a vehicle for entering the exotic Balkans.'¹⁷ It is arguable that the reverse is also true: the Balkans serve as a means towards encountering the 'gypsy' other.

Although they are critical of Shantel, Gogol Bordello are certainly not opposed to the idea of Balkan Beats. Pavla Fleischer's documentary *The Pied Piper of Hützovina*, which follows a journey made by Hütz through Hungary, Ukraine and Russia, includes a scene in which he plays a recording of some of his 'gypsy hip-hop' compositions to Igor Krikunov, the director of the Kiev Gypsy Theatre. Krikunov declares himself to be against this kind of music, saying that it 'harms traditional gypsy music'. Hütz is more interested in blending styles together, and has recorded material as part of his side-project, J.U.F., which is a collaboration with Balkan Beat Box, a New York band made up of Israeli migrants.

Since Gogol Bordello consider themselves to be supporters of Roma Rights and brand Shantel's take on Balkan Beats exploitative, it is worthwhile to compare J.U.F. with 'Disco Partizani', and its 'gypsification' refrain. The most suitable song for this comparison is the first track from J.U.F.'s album *Gogol Bordello vs. Tamir Muskat*, 'Gypsy Part of Town'. Both songs follow the typical Balkan Beats arrangement, combining electronic beats and 'gypsy' melodies and instrumentation, and they are both lyrically multilingual: both begin in English:

¹⁷ Szeman, p.100.

'Disko Partizani' then introduces Romani and Romanian, while in 'Gypsy Part of Town' there are lyrics in Romani and Hebrew. In terms of music and instrumentation, there are more similarities than differences: 'Disko Partizani' is largely accordion driven, whereas 'Gypsy Part of Town' is led by saxophone, but both include outbursts of brass and saxophone solos. 'Gypsy Part of Town' is perhaps more complex, having a less standard verse-chorus structure and including a modulation, but essentially it falls within the same genre conventions as Shantel's song.

More interesting to compare are the implications of the lyrics. While 'Disko Partizani' declares that 'gypsification' is 'what you need', the chorus of the J.U.F. track is, 'gadjo gets lost in a gypsy part of town'. If Shantel is singing about becoming a 'gypsy' while, in Szeman's words, erasing the Roma, then J.U.F. foreground 'gypsies'. The suggestion is that an act of 'gypsification' is taking place, but this is within the 'gypsy part of town', meaning that this seems to take place through infection rather than appropriation. This, combined with the use of the pejorative 'gadjo' to refer to the non-Roma, means that the song comes across as being narrated by a Rom, rather than by someone who is exoticising Romani culture. In actual fact, the 'gypsy part of town' is likely to be a slum, a ghetto or a mahala. Through their reference to this location, J.U.F. describe how non-Roma listeners get lost in, or become entranced by, 'gypsy' music, in this case the manele of contemporary Roma. 'Gypsy Part of Town' thus shows that Balkan Beats need not always entail the erasure of the Roma when elements of 'gypsy' music are incorporated into Western styles. Whereas Shantel's 'Disko Partizani' suggests that non-Romani people can become Roma, causing the Romani people to be lost, in 'Gypsy Part of Town' the non-Roma become lost as they are drawn into a melee of multiply blended musics.

For Hütz and Gogol Bordello, the 'gypsy part of town' is a space not unlike the immigrant melting pot. In the song 'Underdog World Strike', from the album *Gypsy Punks*, Hütz sings, 'Be it punk, hip-hop, be it a reggae sound / It is all connected through the gypsy part of town'. While these lines do retain the 'gypsy' figure and perpetuate the image of the Roma as a ghettoised group, they also break down certain elements of the 'gypsy' stereotype by drawing attention to that

fact that many different styles of music can be heard in Romani communities. Gogol Bordello's 'gypsy' is not an uncivilised nomad, but the central figure in a network of musical and cultural exchange. Szeman has written that, 'As long as the "Gypsy" stamp remains a way to exoticize any music from the Balkans, concerts and videos [...] will continue to perpetuate the romantic Gypsy stereotypes, ultimately failing to bring either the Roma or the Balkans – in their diversity and complexity – closer.'¹⁸ What is interesting about Gypsy Punk is the fact that it is not simply an interpretation of Balkan music; and the 'gypsy' of Gypsy Punk signifies something that is global rather than regional. Despite the derogatory nature of the word 'gypsy', it is less loaded than 'Balkan'¹⁹, with the result that, simply for reasons of nomenclature, Gypsy Punk is more empowering than Balkan Beats.

WHAT IS 'GYPSY' MUSIC?

Music is almost synonymous with the 'gypsy' figure, and it is true that musicianship is widespread among the Roma. Along with trades like ironmongery and horse trading, music suited their nomadic lifestyle in the years before they became settled: it was an occupation that could be engaged in almost anywhere, and a skill for which demand was widespread. When large numbers of Roma were enslaved in the Ottoman Empire, many of them were made to play music for their owners, and those who were able to do so were particularly valued.²⁰ However, in the way that the Roma are commonly presented, more importance is placed on the figure of the 'gypsy' musician than on the sound of the music that they play. As Carol Silverman has written, 'That Roma are often musicians is a commonplace; yet the nature of Rom music has received little scholarly attention. Misunderstandings of it vary from the position that Roma merely borrow and have no music of their

¹⁸ Szeman, p.114.

¹⁹ The connotations and implications of the word 'Balkan' will be considered in depth in Chapter Five.

²⁰ Although, as Ian Hancock points out, many Roma slaves were not permitted to play for their own amusement. See Hancock: *The Pariah Syndrome* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, 1987), pp.18-20.

own [...] to the position that all Hungarian music is Rom music'.²¹ This reflects one of the main questions that has been asked about the music of the Roma: whether it is something that has travelled with the Roma along their migratory path, remaining fundamentally unchanged, or whether it has been gradually picked up on the road, or at various stopping places, and evolved from the styles of numerous regions.

Silverman alludes to the fact that academic studies into what constitutes 'gypsy' music have tended to centre on Hungary. The likely reasons for this are the significant Romani population in Hungary and the fact that the music traditionally played by many of these Roma has been enduringly popular outside of Romani communities. However, as Silverman has pointed out, this is not the only style of music played by Hungarian Roma. The example of Romano Drom, who are Vlach Roma, demonstrates that not all Romani music consists of duelling violins, plaintive accordions, or intricately plucked guitars. Indeed, Silverman says of the different Hungarian Roma groups that 'their musics differ markedly: Romungre music is professional and instrumental; Vlach Rom music is vocal and nonprofessional'²². Romungre music is perhaps the archetypal 'gypsy' music then, if not the most authentic, and it is this style that has been at the centre of scholarly debate about the music of the Roma. The central question of such studies is whether or not the Roma have a music that can be described as their own. In considering this question, I will distinguish between forms of music specific to the Roma, which might be regarded as 'Romani music', and styles associated with but not necessarily originating with the Roma, which I term 'gypsy music'. My intention is to consider the extent to which the Gypsy Punk produced by Gogol Bordello can be defined by these terms.

The earliest significant contributor to the field was the composer Franz Liszt, who published his book *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* in 1859. In this text he opined that all Hungarian music was derived from the music of the Roma. Liszt writes, 'We do not disguise from ourselves that the theory of

²¹ Carol Silverman: 'Rom (Gypsy) Music', Timothy Rice, James Porter and Chris Goertzen (eds.): *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music – Volume 8: Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), p.270.

²² Silverman, p.272.

Hungarian national songs being purely of Bohemian²³ origin is much more hazardous than that of the Zingani being the authors of their own dance music'. However, he then goes on to declare his agreement with 'those who hold that even the most modest national songs of Hungary – those therefore upon which modern art has not the faintest claim have been originally borrowed from the Bohemians; deliberately borrowed by those who fitted them to Hungarian words.'²⁴ He also upholds the stereotype of the Roma being superior musicians, claiming that, 'From the very earliest times these virtuosi were never Magyars; they were always Bohemians, of pure race.'²⁵ Liszt's interest in the music of the Roma is also apparent from his own work, some of which bears the influence of Hungarian Romani music, most notably the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. If it can be said that there is a 'gypsy' music canon then, rightly or wrongly, these compositions would certainly be included in it.

Liszt's view provoked considerable debate, which has continued to this day. This is noted by Silverman, who points out the flaws in both Liszt's argument and those of his adversaries: 'Liszt erringly dismissed the rich Hungarian rural peasant repertoire (collected half a century later), romanticized about Eastern survivals of Roma, and defended Roma as creative interpreters of urban songs. The opposite camp reproached Roma for inhibiting the development of Hungarian creativity in music.'²⁶ The best known figure on this side of the debate is another Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók, who wrote that 'Liszt fell an innocent victim of [the] loose terminology'²⁷ of 'gypsy' music. Although Bartók insisted that the music that is often regarded as 'gypsy' music was in fact not intrinsic to the Roma, he has become associated with 'gypsy' music himself, due to the influence of Hungarian folk music on his compositions. This is an association that has gone as far as Gypsy

²³ Liszt uses the term 'Bohémien' in the original French text, but although 'Bohémiens' is translated as 'Gipsy' in the title, the English translator, Edwin Evans, uses 'Bohemian' throughout. While 'gypsy' is probably a more accurate translation, 'Bohemian' is derived from the French word and denotes non-conformity of the type we have seen in such gypsy figures as Augustus John, and of course, Eugene Hütz. The use of 'Bohemian' is also of possible interest when taken in conjunction with Liszt's prominent use of the 'Rhapsody' form: this means that to the list of musicians who have been influenced by the romantic gypsy stereotype we might make the tenuous addition of Queen.

²⁴ Franz Liszt: *The Gipsy in Music*, trans. Edwin Evans (London: William Reeves, 1926), p.292.

²⁵ Liszt, p.261.

²⁶ Silverman, p.273.

²⁷ Béla Bartók: 'Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music?', Béla Bartók: *Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p.206.

Punk: Hütz has described Bartók as an influence and stated that the original name of Gogol Bordello was Hütz and the Béla Bartóks, though this was abandoned because, 'nobody knows who the hell Béla Bartók is in the United States.'²⁸ In the early twentieth century Bartók and his colleague Zoltán Kodály made field recordings of Hungarian folk music, which they concluded to be distinct from the music of the Roma. Reporting his findings, Bartók begins an essay on 'gypsy' music as follows:

To start without preliminaries, I should like to state that what people (including Hungarians) call 'gipsy music' is not gipsy music but Hungarian music; it is not old folk music but a fairly recent type of Hungarian popular art music composed, practically without exception, by Hungarians of the upper middle class.²⁹

However, he goes on to acknowledge that 'there is real gipsy music too, songs on gipsy texts, but these are known to and sung by the non-musician rural gipsies only, the regular gipsy bands never play them in public. What they do play is the work of Hungarian composers, and consequently Hungarian music.'³⁰ Bartók's viewpoint is supported by A.L. Lloyd, who has written that:

In general, the gypsies borrow from the music of whatever people they happen to be living among; thus, Bulgarian gypsies play a different music from their cousins in Russia, and the repertory of Albanian gypsies does not correspond to that of the gypsies of Slovakia. In Rumania, as elsewhere, the gypsies have for centuries played whatever their customers wanted to hear. Like a true professional, the gypsy minstrel considers music as a commodity rather than as a heritage, and in consequence he is hardly likely to

²⁸ Debbie Elliot: 'Gogol Bordello: Music from 'Gypsy Punks'', *NPR Studio Sessions*, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5371385>>

²⁹ Bartók, p.206.

³⁰ Bartók, p.222.

have preserved much of his own ethnic musical culture.³¹

This is an interesting point in that Lloyd adheres to the stereotypical view that the Roma do not have a strong connection to their heritage. In doing so, he neglects Bartók's point that there is a 'real gypsy music' in addition to the different styles played by different groups of Roma in different countries. Despite his unenlightened insinuations about Romani identity, this is perhaps a more plausible argument. But even if there is no distinct 'real gypsy music' – no genuine Romani music – it seems likely that there are many kinds of 'gypsy' music: the various forms which have developed in countries where Roma have worked as performing artists and which have continued to be performed by and associated with the Roma. If there is, or ever was, also a music native to the Roma themselves, then this seems much harder to identify. If there was ever such a music then it has certainly become hybridised with the other forms that have been adopted by Romani musicians, just as those forms may have been influenced by the music of the Roma, the hypothetical Romani music. Silverman's point that, 'Roma are neither bereft of music of their own nor merely cultural sponges'³² seems the most reasonable conclusion here.

As we know, it is not only the Roma who have adopted and adapted forms of traditional music: there are examples of 'gypsy' music that are produced by non-Roma, and Gogol Bordello's music might be regarded as such. When examining perceptions of Balkan music, we considered the composer Goran Bregović, who frequently makes use of traditional 'gypsy' songs in his work. A prominent example of this is the song 'Ederlezi', which was used in Emir Kusturica's film *Time of the Gypsies* in an arrangement by Bregović. The same version of the song was also featured in the film *Borat*, which makes extensive use of music from the Balkans and performed by Romani musicians, but on the soundtrack listing to this film, Bregović is credited not as arranger, but as composer. Donna A. Buchanan asks of Bregović's appropriation of the work of other musicians, 'Is this the postmodern condition or "stealing" around? Bregović himself is not sure. He is

³¹ A. L. Lloyd: 'The Music of Rumanian Gypsies', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 90th Session (1963-64), p.19.

³² Silverman, p.273.

keen to indulge interviewers with his mischievous evasion of questions about appropriating sources from the Balkan storehouse, or lending his work to political causes, or expressing loyalty to any border.³³ This means that it is tempting to think of him as we might of a Romani musician, as someone who cannot be confined to a single location or style.

However, Martin Stokes sets Bregović at the heart of a complex exchange of musical forms, which echoes the continuous exchange of music between Romani and non-Romani peoples.³⁴ His example is Turkish singer Sezen Aksu's 1997 album *Düğün ve Cenaze*, which consists entirely of recordings of Bregović's songs. While these are his original compositions, much of the music is played by the Macedonian Roma brass band Koçani Orkestar; Stokes notes that these musicians feature on all of the tracks, whereas they did not play on all of Bregović's original songs. This can be construed as Aksu, a musician from outside the Balkans, exaggerating the extent to which Bregović deploys the Balkan 'gypsy' music he has adopted, which might reduce the severity of his alleged thefts. We can also read *Düğün ve Cenaze* as a reclamation of 'gypsy' brass, which has its origins in Ottoman military music, by a Turkish musician. A similar paradigm can be located in Gogol Bordello's Gypsy Punk. In this instance, we find a band who foreground their connections to the Roma despite having only one member who is part Roma, and who establish Balkan associations through their creation of the fictional country of Hützovina. By developing a form of 'gypsy' music that also draws on punk, reggae and Latin music, Gogol Bordello illustrate the possibility of exchange between diverse styles of music and reveal that 'gypsy' music cannot be defined only with reference to the idea of Romani music.

Moreover, the notion of 'gypsy' music is informed at least as strongly by perceptions of 'gypsies' as it is by studies of the music itself. Simon Frith has pointed out that in the definitions of specialist music charts, "Women's music," for example, is interesting not as music which somehow expresses "women," but as music which seeks to define them, just as "black music" works to set up a very

³³ Donna A. Buchanan: "Oh, Those Turks!" Music, Politics, and Interculturality in the Balkans and Beyond', Donna A. Buchanan (ed.): *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene*, p.87.

³⁴ Martin Stokes: 'Shedding Light on the Balkans: Sezen Aksu's Anatolian Pop', Donna A. Buchanan (ed.): *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene*, pp.324-328.

particular notion of what “blackness” is.’³⁵ Similarly, the idea of the ‘gypsy’ musician is used to define the figure of the ‘gypsy’. But despite the renown of ‘gypsy’ music, very little has been written about it compared with the number of texts which deal with the Roma themselves. In one of the few books that do provide an investigation concerning what ‘gypsy’ music actually is, musicologist David Malvinni notes that, ‘Romantic ideas about Gypsies remain stunningly present in the marketing of music as Gypsy. In order to package something as Gypsy music, producers rely on the age-old stereotypes of Gypsiness.’³⁶ Indeed, even as stereotypes about the Roma are beginning to be broken down by activism and education, ‘gypsy’ music remains an area in which they persist. Malvinni also points out that ‘Roma musicians will sometimes revert to being eerily complicit in embodying Gypsiness, a stereotype that politically speaking should be rejected.’³⁷ Although the ‘gypsy’ of Gypsy Punk is a much more empowered figure than the more commonly encountered stereotypical ‘gypsy’, this can also be applied to Gogol Bordello. Perhaps the Roma Rights advocates who have contributed so much to change in other areas deem music to be less consequential; at any rate, it is interesting that while ‘Roma’ is generally considered to be a preferable designation to ‘gypsy’, it apparently remains perfectly acceptable for both record labels and consumers to talk of ‘gypsy’ music rather than ‘Romani music’. This suggests that while the Roma are now being seen more accurately as a culture, the music they play remains something that is constructed and commodified from outside.

‘GYPSY’ MUSIC TODAY

We have already ascertained that Gogol Bordello’s form of Gypsy Punk is informed by numerous different styles of music, but the fact that they style themselves as a Gypsy Punk band, along with the associations that the Balkan music they draw on

³⁵ Simon Frith: ‘Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music’, Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (eds.): *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.138.

³⁶ David Malvinni: *The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.x.

³⁷ Malvinni, p.xi.

evokes in many listeners, means that their work can arguably be described as a kind of 'gypsy' music. Yet their sound is somewhat removed from what is considered by many consumers to be the sound of 'gypsy' music: the instrumental, string-driven Romungre music that originates in Hungary. In addition, it would seem that the Romani view is that Gypsy Punk is some way removed from the music of the Roma. Carol Silverman describes attending the a Gogol Bordello concert at the 2005 New York Gypsy Festival, along with several Macedonian Roma who live in The Bronx. She writes that:

they were totally baffled at any connection Gogol Bordello and the other Gypsy Punk groups might have with Romani music. They saw Gogol's show as a circuslike parody of their own culture and were insulted and bored. But note that they had no problem with the phenomenon of Americans playing Gypsy music.³⁸

In fact, 'gypsy' music remains as indefinite a term as 'gypsy' itself; the contemporary musicians that are considered to play 'gypsy' music vary widely. Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances comes to mind here: although there may seem to be no particular common denominator that links certain styles of 'gypsy' music, there is a resemblance between them.³⁹ However, this is not necessarily borne out only through the way that they sound. This will become evident as we consider three bands from Romania and consider what they have in common with Gypsy Punk. The strings of Taraf de Haïdouks may sound very different to the brass of Fanfare Ciocărlia, and the manele-influenced sound of Mahala Rai Banda, is different again. What the three groups have in common is that they are all made up of Romani musicians, and all three play distinctive forms of music, elements of which can be discerned in Gypsy Punk.

The musicians who make up Taraf de Haïdouks come from a village called Clejani, which has become regarded as an important centre of 'gypsy' music. Garth Cartwright says that, 'for generations it was celebrated across the Wallachian

³⁸ Carol Silverman: *Romani Routes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.266.

³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p.32.

plains as home to *lăutari* – the name once given to the trade of fiddler that's evolved to specify the Tzigane caste of professional musicians.⁴⁰ However, it seems to be the more recent emergence of Taraf de Haïdouks that has consolidated the almost mythical repute of Clejani. Their music is string-led, dominated by violins and cimbaloms, and are they noted for their virtuosity and the astonishing speed with which they play. Writing about the music of the Hungarian Romungre, Silverman has described how, 'What has been called the essential ants'-nest bundle in the music is achieved by heterophony, that is, two or more instruments simultaneously playing the melody with variant ornamentation.'⁴¹ The presence of such heterophony in the music of Taraf de Haïdouks only accentuates its pace. The clattering of their cimbaloms, which sound halfway between percussion and stringed instruments, and their frantic violin playing, together produce a sound that is unique while still unmistakably a kind of 'gypsy' music.

Although they are popular in Western Europe and can boast that they have been flown to California by Johnny Depp to play at a party he was holding, they are less well known in their native Romania. In fact, at a major 'gypsy' music concert in Bucharest in June 2009 they took on the role of support act, while the band at the top of the bill was Gogol Bordello. This indicates that the Romanian audience is more interested in more contemporary styles of 'gypsy' music (the popularity of *manele* is also testament to this), whereas in the West there is a greater interest in traditional forms. The fact that Taraf de Haïdouks are not only Romani musicians playing for non-Roma, but also musicians from Eastern Europe playing to the West, is also significant. Exoticised due to both their 'gypsiness' and their Balkan origins, they have a dual appeal in the West, whereas in their native Romania, the more foreign Gogol Bordello exert a greater pull.

While the name Taraf de Haïdouks, which means 'band of brigands', might connote a group of musicians brought together by chance who operate outside the mainstream, this is a carefully fabricated image: they are in fact a manufactured band. As Chris Nickson notes, 'It might seem strange to think of a band of Romanian village musicians as a manufactured band like 'N Sync. But while there's

⁴⁰ Garth Cartwright: *Princes Amongst Men: Journeys with Gypsy Musicians* (London: Serpents Tail, 2007), p.188.

⁴¹ Silverman: 'Rom (Gypsy) Music', p.274.

nothing fake about their sound, it's true that prior to their first tour in Western Europe, the ensemble of Taraf de Haïdouks didn't exist as such.⁴² Their story begins when, 'In 1986 musicologist Speranța Rădulescu took a Swiss colleague, Laurent Aubert, to Clejani. Aubert recorded a six-man band and arranged for Ocora, an ethnographic label funded by Radio France, to release a CD in 1988.'⁴³ The resulting album, *Roumanie – Musique Des Tsiganes De Valachie* inspired Belgian music promoter Stephane Karo to seek out Clejani. He succeeded, and promised the lăutari, who were deprived of movement under Ceaușescu, that he would take them to Belgium:

Karo kept his word: on hearing of Ceaușescu's execution in 1989, he returned to Clejani and assembled a dozen Lăutari, lead [sic] by [Nicolae] Neacsu. He named the outfit Taraf de Haïdouks (Band of Outlaws) and signed them to the Belgian label Crammed Discs. Their 1991 debut, *Muzique des Tziganes de Roumanie* was an immediate sensation, topping the European world music charts.⁴⁴

This process follows the well-established precedent of Romani musicians playing music for a non-Romani audience. However, the distance between musician and listener has a new dimension here, as the 'band of gypsies' has been assembled by a non-Roma from the west. This shows how the musical relationship between the Roma and non-Roma has changed, and also suggests that perceptions of what constitutes 'gypsy' music are so engrained that it can be constructed by the non-Roma who want to hear it. Taraf de Haïdouks clearly conform to the West's expectations of 'gypsy' music and, despite their enormous skill and status as the preeminent modern lăutari, their renown depends on their 'gypsiness' as much as on their musicianship.

This is certainly not a criticism of their success, or an attempt to cast doubts

⁴² Chris Nickson: 'Taraf de Haidouks', *National Geographic Music*
<http://worldmusic.nationalgeographic.com/view/page.basic/artist/content.artist/taraf_de_haidouks_23110/en_US/en_US>

⁴³ Cartwright, p.188.

⁴⁴ Garth Cartwright: 'Obituary: Nicolae Neacsu: Romanian Gypsy violinist who conquered the west', *The Guardian* 16 September 2002, p.20.

on their talents. In fact, it is their remarkable skill as musicians that gives rise to their perceived 'gypsiness'. Although Taraf de Haïdouks are Roma, this is less important in the West than the fact that they are 'gypsies', and this is determined by their musicianship as much as it is by their ethnicity. A similar construction of 'gypsiness' operates around Gogol Bordello, who, as we know, are not Roma. Although their music owes less to the traditional sounds of Romani music in Eastern Europe, these are still detectable on much of their work. Their 2007 album *Super Taranta* is the most 'gypsy' sounding of their records, and comparisons with Taraf de Haïdouks' music are most noticeable on this album. Sergey Ryabtsev's violin has been a prominent part of Gogol Bordello's music since he joined the band in 2000, but his playing on *Super Taranta* is comparatively more intricate than in any of their previous work. The extended violin solo of 'Strange Uncles From Abroad' is reminiscent of lightning-fast playing of Taraf de Haïdouks, while 'Suddenly... (I Miss Carpaty)' is even more immediately 'gypsy'; in this song there are heterophonic passages of accordion and violin, mixed with percussive singing in the style of the Hungarian Vlach Roma. Ryabtsev is a popular figure with fans of Gogol Bordello: at the moments in their gigs when his playing and showmanship is the centre of attention the reaction from the audience is particularly great. This may be a reflection of the fact that lively violin playing is regarded as a hallmark of 'gypsy' music: Ryabtsev thus ensures that Gogol Bordello conform sufficiently to the expectations of audiences hoping to hear 'gypsy' music.

If Taraf de Haïdouks are regarded in the West as a prime example of contemporary 'gypsy' music, then they have a counterpart in Fanfare Ciocărlia, a Romani brass band who have been successfully exported to Western Europe. Indeed, they have much in common with Taraf de Haïdouks: although their music is played on brass rather than string instruments, it is also characterised by its fast tempo and the dexterity of the musicians, who maintain the pace while playing complex melodies. They are also from a small Romanian village, Zece Prajini in the northeast of the country, and have a similar career trajectory to Taraf de Haïdouks. They were discovered by a German, Henry Ernst, who heard about the brass musicians of Zece Prajini in 1996 while travelling in Romania. He says that:

It was so amazing I ended up staying not one day but three months and assembling a brass band. Fanfare is a French word that's passed into Romanian and is used to describe a brass band. Ciocărlia, that's the Romanian for a lark's song. I returned to Germany and sold everything I had to make one tour.⁴⁵

Szeman has described such accounts of Western managers importing music from the Balkans as 'discovery narratives that re-enact Balkanism',⁴⁶ and it seems that the romance of these stories contributes to the popularity of the musicians in the West. Although Fanfare Ciocărlia's initial tour was not a financial success, the reception that they achieved convinced Ernst to turn them professional and he founded a record label, Asphalt Tango. Fanfare Ciocărlia are now highly successful, touring internationally and continuing to gain great acclaim. Asphalt Tango has also grown, having released not only eight Fanfare Ciocărlia albums, but also records by other popular Romani musicians from the Balkans, such as Mahala Rai Banda and Kal. Fanfare Ciocărlia share their style with numerous other bands, and can be classified as part of a subgenre of 'gypsy' music known as Balkan Brass. This is a form that might be described as genuinely Balkan, since it is not confined to any one part of the region: other brass bands who have been imported to the West include Boban Marković Orkestar from Serbia, and the Macedonian Koçani Orkestar. Its origins in fact lie further east: Balkan Brass derives from Ottoman military music and is testament to legacy of Ottoman rule in the Balkans.

As will be apparent from its origins, Balkan Brass is not an exclusively Romani form of music. However, the bands who have achieved the greatest success playing it for Western audiences tend to be Romani, and it is presented to such audiences as a form of 'gypsy' music. This is a reflection of the fact that Balkan music and 'gypsy' music are often incorrectly conflated. Any music that originates in the Balkans is often thought to be 'gypsy' music, and much of the music produced by Romani musicians is regarded as Balkan: this will be discussed in Chapter Six. We can discern this simply by looking at the case of Gogol Bordello, whose work has been described as both 'gypsy' and Balkan, despite the fact that

⁴⁵ Cartwright: *Princes Amongst Men*, p.214.

⁴⁶ Szeman, p.100.

the bands Romani connections are minimal, and there is nothing Balkan about any of the musicians involved.

However, as we have already seen, Gogol Bordello have played with Western audiences' understanding of the Balkans by creating the fictional Balkan country of Hützovina, which featured prominently in their first two albums. Their referencing of Balkan themes has continued as far as their more recent work: *Super Taranta* not only channels the traditional string-driven 'gypsy' music sound, but also includes more broadly Balkan elements. There are some songs that feature Balkan Brass: the brass parts were supplied not by a band from the Balkans but by the New York group Slavic Soul Party, but the fast-paced and dynamic sound is associated closely enough with the Balkan region that the actual origin of the musicians playing it will be unimportant to many listeners. One of these songs, 'American Wedding', is particularly interesting as part of an examination of Gogol Bordello's use of 'gypsy' music styles. A comic comparison between the Romani weddings of Eastern Europe that can include several days of dancing and feasting, and more staid Western nuptials, it directly references Fanfare Ciocărlia, when Hütz asks, 'Where is the band that, like Fanfare, gonna keep it going twenty-four hours?' It is perhaps ironic that, as the inclusion in 'American Wedding' of music by Slavic Soul Party proves, one does not need to travel to the Balkans to find music of this kind. However, Hütz chooses to present Balkan music as something less accessible; Gogol Bordello thus become a unique route towards the Balkans.

As is the case with Taraf de Haïdouks, Fanfare Ciocărlia are more popular in the West than they are in their native region. The final Romani band from Romania that I want to consider is unusual in being a crossover artist in terms of their popularity in both the Balkans and the West. Mahala Raï Banda do not have the rural associations of Taraf de Haïdouks or Fanfare Ciocărlia: the Romanian word 'mahala' means 'slum' and is generally used to refer to the Romani ghettos on the fringes of cities.⁴⁷ They are a more urban band, and play the more urban style of manele, which is very popular, although divisive, in Romania, but little-known in

⁴⁷ Beissinger has suggested that these areas existed, and were inhabited by gypsy musicians, as far back as the sixteenth century. See Beissinger: *The Art of the Lăutar: The Epic Tradition of Romania* (New York: Garland, 1991), p.18.

Western Europe. The music that Mahala Raï Banda play is thus closer to that of most contemporary Balkan Roma musicians than anything else that has been successfully imported to the West. However, their work has been released by both Crammed Discs, which brought Taraf de Haïdouks to prominence in the West, and Asphalt Tango, the label founded in order to promote Fanfare Ciocărlia. Additionally, Mahala Raï Banda is led by Aurel Ioniță, a musician from Clejani, who is related to several members of Taraf de Haïdouks. There are therefore a band through whom manele can be marketed to Western 'gypsy' music audiences. Moreover, their music is sufficiently westernised that it is regarded as having worth in Balkan communities, but simultaneously exotic enough to be well received in the West, where, as Cartwright explains, most manele would be unlikely to find an appreciative audience:

Mahala Raï Banda's manele flourishes only hint at the electronic hybrids developing in the Balkans. "Mahala" means "Gypsy ghetto" and in these urban environments, digital technology is employed to make music. Most of this music will never leave the Balkans; it's just too trashy and bizarre for Western audiences to get their heads around.⁴⁸

The electronic elements of manele mean that it can be compared to Balkan Beats, and as the Balkan Beats genre grows in popularity, it is not implausible that manele will also infiltrate the Western music market. Indeed, it is more than likely that manele has influenced the remixes of 'gypsy' music that have dominated Balkan Beats. Although Gogol Bordello do not employ a manele sound in any of their work, the crossover appeal of Mahala Raï Banda's work means that they have something in common. Like Mahala Raï Banda, Gogol Bordello tread the line between the Balkans and the West in such a way that they can be appealing to audiences in both regions. However, Mahala Raï Banda differ in that they are a Romani band who play a style of music that is associated with the Roma. Gogol Bordello's work, which combines 'gypsy' music elements with other styles, also

⁴⁸ Garth Cartwright: 'Blowing up a storm', *The Independent*, 5 May 2006, Arts & Book Review p.3.

treads a line between 'gypsy' and non-'gypsy'.

Despite Mahala Rai Banda's function as a vehicle for transporting manele from Romania to the West, crossovers are as apparent in 'gypsy' music audiences as they are in bands. The fact that Gogol Bordello and Taraf de Haïdouks appeared on the same billing in Bucharest reveals that two quite different styles of music, when juxtaposed beneath the 'gypsy' music umbrella, can share an audience. This was also apparent at the inaugural Balkanfest festival, which took place in Kiev in December 2009. The lineup included Gogol Bordello and Fanfare Ciocărlia, along with other bands from opposite ends of the 'gypsy' music spectrum: Koçani Orkestar, Kal, Ukrainian ska band Haydamaky and Emir Kusturica's band, the No Smoking Orchestra. The name 'Balkanfest' should not go unremarked on here; although more than half of the musicians involved were from the Balkans, the festival itself took place in Ukraine, and the music was not exclusively Balkan. As such, we can see an instance of balkanism taking place in a location that is, from a Western perspective, beyond the Balkans. The 'gypsy' music being performed here is taken as indicative of the nature of that region; while notions of the Balkans as war-torn or uncivilised were not present here, the stereotype of wildness and hedonism that the region shares with the Roma was very much in evidence.

We have already seen that Gypsy Punk entails the reining in of such stereotypes, and there are signs that Romani musicians are evolving their sounds in order to follow this pattern, and to challenge notions about their Romani culture and the Balkan countries that they are from. Both Taraf de Haïdouks and Fanfare Ciocărlia have released albums that reinterpret 'gypsy' music in manners that could, in their blending of traditional 'gypsy' music with other styles, be considered Gypsy Punk. Taraf de Haïdouks' record, *Maskarada* (2007), is the less punk of the two, consisting predominantly of renditions of classical works played in a 'gypsy' style, along with a few original compositions. The composers covered include the Hungarians Bartók and Kosma, as well as Spanish composers such as Albeniz and de Falla, whose presence invites us to think of flamenco. *Maskarada* reopens the debate about 'gypsy' music that was instigated by Liszt, and as might be expected of a band whose 'gypsiness' is used as a marketing tool, the view taken by their record label is that 'gypsy' music was borrowed from, rather than the other way

around. However, the overall perception is more balanced than Liszt's:

'In the early twentieth century, many composers drew their inspiration from national folklore, often borrowing from Roma musicians to create their own vision of an exotic and largely imaginary Orient. Things have now been turned around, as one of the world's leading Gypsy bands have taken hold of classical pieces and have "re-gypsified" them, giving them an exhilarating make-over.'⁴⁹

So this album purports to function as a reclamation of a music that has its earliest origins with the Roma. However, the writer of the liner notes admits that the association between the two forms of music is ambiguous: 'As a result of the constant to-and-fro, it is not easy to decide who is wearing the disguise: is it the rural Gypsy band playing a Strauss waltz, or the Western European orchestra playing in a "Hungarian" style? It's a gigantic masquerade'.⁵⁰ This is a refreshing way of looking at 'gypsy' music; it allows us to see it as something that can have a reciprocal relationship with other styles, although it does not offer any answers as to whether there can be a definitive 'gypsy' music. In *Maskarada*, Taraf de Haïdouks are perpetuating the exchange between 'gypsy' music and classical music that has gone on for well over a hundred years, showing that even though there is no current trend for classical composers to utilise 'gypsy' elements, the relationship nonetheless persists. More significantly, it reveals that Romani musicians maintain an awareness of music from beyond their traditional 'gypsy' repertoires; this means that they appear as less of a closed culture and are less open to stereotyping.

The premise of Fanfare Ciocărlia's album *Gili Garabdi: Ancient Secrets of Gypsy Brass* (2005) is that a connection can be drawn between 'gypsy music' and jazz: "How many Gypsies fled Romania when slavery ended for the United States?" Ioan [Ivancea, Fanfare Ciocărlia's bandleader,] once answered when asked if jazz was a big influence on Fanfare. "Who's to say our cousins who went to the US

⁴⁹ Jean-Stéphane Brosse: sleeve notes to *Maskarada*.

⁵⁰ Brosse: sleeve notes to *Maskarada*.

didn't help invent jazz?"⁵¹ Garth Cartwright, who wrote the sleeve notes for the album, seems taken with this idea, noting in his book *Princes Among Men* that, 'Tens of thousands of Balkan Roma migrated to the US during the nineteenth century' and that 'the Roma would have lived – as they did in the Balkans – in the poor part of town, cheek by jowl with another people who knew too much about slavery and discrimination and used brass and string instruments'⁵². Although Gypsy Jazz became an established form in Paris, this jazz connection seems a very doubtful possibility and, in fact, the music of *Gili Garabdi* is not all that dissimilar from any of Fanfare Ciocărlia's previous work, which was presented as straight-up 'gypsy' brass. Compared to their earlier albums there is a slight increase in the number of slower pieces, and at times the use of guest vocalists helps to make the jazz connection seem more credible: for example, Bulgarian Roma singer Jony Iliev, an extremely versatile vocalist, lends a mellow croon to 'Ma Maren Ma' that would not sound out of place in a smoky subterranean jazz bar. But the insistent pulse of the tenor horns that is characteristic of 'gypsy' brass underlies much of the album, and these basslines alone make the record far more 'gypsy' than jazz.

One attempt at foregrounding the jazz premise is a cover of Duke Ellington's 'Caravan'. This is an almost unrecognisable version of Ellington's original, and while the Fanfare Ciocărlia interpretation swings in the same way, the tempo is increased to the level typically used by the Roma, and the tenor horns provide their usual bassline. A similarly unrecognisable cover version of Steppenwolf's 'Born to Be Wild' features on Fanfare Ciocărlia's subsequent album *Queens and Kings* (2007). But while 'Born to Be Wild' makes no claims to represent a connection between 'gypsy' music and hard rock, 'Caravan' is intended as evidence for the supposed link between 'gypsy' music and jazz. But the striking difference between Fanfare Ciocărlia's version and Duke Ellington's original destroys the likelihood of this link, reinforcing the 'gypsiness' of the music and denying its jazz connections. While this may be great music, it is not jazz. Overall, *Gili Garabdi* is more successful in concept than realisation: the dubious suggestion that Romani émigrés may have helped to invent jazz in America is more original than the music presented to illustrate this idea. However, as with *Maskarada*, it demonstrates that

⁵¹ Garth Cartwright: sleeve notes to *Gili Garabdi*.

⁵² Cartwright: *Princes Amongst Men*, p.48.

Romani musicians are interested in experimenting with genre and this may help to free them from stereotyping.

David Malvinni has suggested that in a contemporary record store we might find three forms of 'gypsy' music, which he describes as, 'The three streams of the autonomous Gypsy music bin.'⁵³ The first of these, he says, is concerned with ethnographic purity and follows a conception of 'gypsy' music derived from Bartók. This is often taken to be the most typical 'gypsy' music; it is played by Romani musicians who are typically natives of Eastern Europe and conforms to the consumer's expectations of 'gypsy' music. The second stream is described by Malvinni as 'music beyond the West'⁵⁴, and can have its origins as far away as India. It purports to relate to the movements taken by the Roma from Rajasthan to Eastern Europe, and it therefore contains elements taken from various stopping places along this route. The final category, 'Gypsy World Music', is said to be 'produced with the burgeoning world-music audience in mind as intended listeners and buyers'⁵⁵. The two examples that Malvinni cites here are Kalyi Jag and Csókolom, both Hungarian bands who play from a traditional 'gypsy' repertoire, adding inflections from popular music. All three of the contemporary Romanian bands I have considered – Taraf de Haïdouks, Fanfare Ciocărlia and Mahala Rai Banda – could also be thought of as part of the 'Gypsy World Music' category: they have been marketed in the West with specific audiences in mind.

Adriana Helbig argues that 'gypsy' music is very much a form of world music and has become:

A broad marketing category comprising 1) any music performed by musicians of Romani descent; 2) Gypsy music performed either by Roma and/or non-Roma; 3) traditional and popular fusion musics that incorporate elements of various Gypsy musical expressions, texts, and performed by Roma and/or non-Roma, 4) Romani-based styles that are differentiated according to gender, age, socio-economic background, and the musician's country of

⁵³ Malvinni, p.208.

⁵⁴ Malvinni, p.209.

⁵⁵ Malvinni, p.210.

origin.⁵⁶

Gogol Bordello could arguably be assigned to Malvinni's category of 'Gypsy World Music', although their music tends to be found in record stores' rock and pop sections. Their use of 'gypsy' music elements combined with outside influences means that their Gypsy Punk could potentially be marketed as a kind of world music. However, Hütz has spoken critically of this term, and he would no doubt be as unenthused at the idea of Kalyi Jag or Taraf de Haïdouks being categorised as world music as he is at the notion that Gogol Bordello could be regarded as such. Nevertheless, Helbig's assertion that 'gypsy' music is marketed as a form of world music is certainly not out of place in an environment where globally popular bands like Fanfare Ciocărlia and Taraf de Haïdouks are the best known players of 'gypsy' music.

Helbig goes on to argue that, for Hütz, 'Gypsy music functions as a category that can be filled with one's own perceptions, emotions, and experiences.'⁵⁷ Although he has far fewer qualms about the term 'gypsy' music than he does with the idea of world music, Hütz has never claimed that this can be equated with Gypsy Punk. As we have seen, 'gypsy' music has specific connotations and associations, but it also has a broad range of manifestations and, indeed, it is a form that is open to individual artistic manipulation. Malvinni states that 'the Gypsy music bin is a cognitive construct, an entrance and exit into a way of thinking about the world through a nomadic identity that is restless.'⁵⁸ Gogol Bordello certainly provide routes into such a way of thinking in that they frequently include markers of 'gypsy' music in their work both musically and lyrically. However, the way that these are used almost incidentally indicates that creating 'gypsy' music is not their intention, and that the 'gypsy' figure is not central to their work. Malvinni refers to a 'nomadic identity' and in order to determine what it is that is central to Gypsy Punk, it is worth considering the idea of the nomad in more general terms, along with the figure of the immigrant, and this will be our focus further through the

⁵⁶ Adriana Helbig: "All Connected Through the Gypsy Part of Town": The Gypsyfication of East European Immigrant Identity in U.S. Gypsy Punk Music', *Romano Džaniben*, Winter 2009, p.89.

⁵⁷ Helbig, p.89.

⁵⁸ Malvinni, p.211.

thesis as we move towards and expand upon the concept of immigrant music. In the meantime, however, we turn to the influence of punk on Gogol Bordello.

CHAPTER THREE:

Immigrant punk and its antecedents: time, place and class in London, in New York, and beyond

LEEDS, MARCH 2008

I'm alone on Gogol Bordello's tourbus. As a non-smoker I'm a minority tonight, and everyone else has gathered outside. The afterparty began in a bar across the street from the venue, but soon decamped to this car park, where two tourbuses are parked up. One has been designated the quiet bus, while the other, the one I am aboard, is the party bus. I'm here to refill my plastic cup with vodka, and I'm just about to screw the cap back onto the bottle when Eugene Hütz climbs aboard the bus. He did not join the rest of us at the bar, so this is the first I've seen of him since the gig. It's not the first time I have met Hütz, but we are not particularly well acquainted and I wonder how he'll take the fact that I've been enthusiastically making my way through his band's drink. But he seems pleased to see me, and we exchange greetings before he heads upstairs.

Later, when the wind becomes colder, everyone moves inside the bus. Midnight marked the beginning of guitarist Oren Kaplan's birthday, and having made rapid progress with the celebrations, he is now lying semi-conscious across a bench seat at the far end of the bus. At the other end of the bus, there are perhaps ten of us gathered when Hütz takes up his guitar and begins to play some new songs he has been working on. He strums his characteristic minor chords and sings: 'Don't ever try to change your man, girl'. It's a slow song that seems to be an examination of what men want from women; 'mothering' and 'nurturing', apparently. He follows it with another song, about spending the night drinking with a formerly estranged friend: 'I'll buy you a drink / And I'll tell you what I think / And we'll get to the bottom of the bottle and all things.' These acoustic

experiments will not make it into the Gypsy Punk canon. Hütz went on to play both songs live a few times, but they have not been developed further or included on any of Gogol Bordello's albums. Perhaps this is because they are neither sufficiently 'gypsy' nor truly punk; they are too simple to be regarded as 'gypsy' music, but not raw enough to be punk. After finishing the second song, Hütz plays a song he learned from the Russian Roma guitarist Sasha Kolpakov. It sounds more heartfelt than his own new compositions. There is both intricacy and rawness in its notes and chords; somehow it is not only more 'gypsy' but also, despite its languor and melancholy, more punk.

He puts down the guitar and slopes off with a pretty photographer, who has been vying with the guitar for his attention all evening. They go to the other end of the bus, where Oren is still lying, now completely unconscious. They collapse on the bench opposite him, mostly concealed by a table. I'm emboldened by the vodka and drawn to the abandoned guitar. It's the same instrument that Hütz plays on stage, a Takamine with nylon strings. I pick it up and play a couple of chords. Which song, from my limited repertoire, should I play? Not something quite so obvious as a Gogol Bordello song, but something that can follow on from Hütz's impromptu performance without changing the mood too much. A Romani song then: 'Pala Tute', which became familiar to fans of Gypsy Punk when Hütz played it the 2007 Live Earth concert, as a guest performer during Madonna's set. At this time, I have no idea that it will go on to become a live staple for Gogol Bordello and open their fifth album, *Trans-Continental Hustle*, in 2010. My playing is no doubt impaired by vodka and my singing voice leaves much to be desired – but then, Hütz is no crooner. I launch into the first verse – 'Lela lela lela / Lela pala tute / Zhas kana meres / Merava pala late' – but my memory of the song soon begins to stumble and I'm forced to improvise inexpertly.

At the other end of the bus, Hütz still has his face buried below the level of the tabletop. His legs and those of the photographer hang off the end of the bench and intertwine. Then one of his arms extends above the table and his hand forms a gesture that's clearly directed at the music I'm playing. It's a signal of approval, a thumbs up. Like the Kolpakov song, 'Pala Tute' has that combination of 'gypsy' and punk and its sound seems almost like a microcosm of Gogol Bordello's aesthetic.

Hütz has remarked that when he left Kiev for the Carpathians with his family as a teenager he found similarities between the music of his Romani relatives and the punk that had informed his adolescent musical tastes. On the tourbus that night, listening to him play Kolpakov and then playing 'Pala Tute' myself, I started to detect those similarities.

In this chapter I explore the connections that punk has with other forms of music, in order to determine how it is used as the base of Gogol Bordello's sound. I begin by considering The Fags, the first band that Eugene Hütz formed after he arrived in the USA, with the aim of assessing how the Gypsy Punk sound developed. From here we move to an overview of the history of punk: however, this is not clear-cut, as different manifestations of punk appeared on the two sides of the Atlantic. By examining both within the contexts of time, place and class, we are able to better understand what the idea of punk represents in Gypsy Punk. We then consider the connections that punk has with reggae – connections that came about within immigrant communities – and finally we assess the prevalence of punk on a global level. Ultimately, it will become apparent that the immigrant discourses of Gogol Bordello's work reflect those that have been at play in punk throughout the genre's history, and in an array of different places.

THE FAGS

Eugene Hütz arrived in Burlington, Vermont in 1991, an immigrant intent on forming a band. He found a job in a record store called Pure Pop Records and began advertising for band members, citing his influences as Sonic Youth, Fugazi and Dinosaur Jr. The resulting product was The Fags, a three piece punk band in which Hütz (who was at this time still using the surname Nikolaev) was joined by Dana Shephard on drums and Jason Cooley on bass. Burlington's music scene was at the time monopolised by the Grateful Dead-inspired jazz rock band Phish and, for many, the rawer sound of The Fags was a welcome alternative.¹ They achieved a reasonable degree of local success, playing gigs at Burlington's premier music

¹ Limited information about The Fags exists, but for a good source, see Brad Searles: 'Before the Bordello: When Eugene was a Fag' on the blog *Bradley's Almanac*
<<http://www.bradleysalmanac.com/2007/07/before-bordello-when-eugene-was-fag.htm>>

venue, Club Toast, and in 1995 releasing an album called *No Fleas Lunch Money and Gold Teeth*.

This album is a fascinating document in the history of Gypsy Punk. While The Fags were by no means a proto-Gogol Bordello, their function as an outlet for Hütz's early creative endeavours means that his plans for the Gypsy Punk genre are evident in their material. Comparisons to Fugazi and Dinosaur Jr. can certainly be upheld, though the more sophisticated sound of Sonic Youth was evidently beyond the reach of The Fags. Hütz has recently described their style as 'Ethno-punk-hard-core... ridiculous, what the fuck kind of shit...'² This is of course hyperbolic; compared to Gogol Bordello, The Fags sound quite conventional, but the loose classification of hardcore punk is accurate. What distinguished The Fags from other bands within this sub-genre was that they were rather more melodic, but in spite of occasional appearances from an accordion on *No Fleas*, they never broke any boundaries of genre. Hütz's heavily accented singing was also a source of interest, but there were few indicators of his immigrant background in the band's music or lyrics. Even his trademark moustache, which can be taken as a symbol of 'gypsiness', was yet to appear. This, along with the fact that neither of Hütz's colleagues in The Fags were immigrants, makes the claim that they were an 'ethno-punk' band difficult to support. However, one of the songs from *No Fleas* bears analysis in this context, if only to determine whether it can be thought of as diverting from the punk genre in any way.

'Jung and Crazee' is of interest partly because it went on to be recycled as the Gogol Bordello song 'Nomadic Chronicle', which appeared on their debut album *Voi-La Intruder*.³ There are numerous differences between the two versions of this track. The song was slowed down significantly and made completely acoustic for the Gogol Bordello version, and the chorus was changed from being a diatribe about freedom and beating the system to the simpler refrain 'Hoya, hoy, hoy, paranoia'. However, a significant chunk of lyrics from the verses remained:

² Eugene Hütz: 'Recommended Music', Gogol Bordello website
<<http://gogolbordello.com/hutzovina/recommended/index.php>>

³ This is not the only instance of this form of recycling. 'Stadium Rock' by The Fags was reworked as 'Letter to Castro (Costumes for Tonight)', also on *Voi-La Intruder*.

Back when I was young and crazy
As they say boy sure I worked pretty hard yo
Stole some money from my mom
Hit the road to Leningrad
I get stopped on next train stop
In the middle of rural Ukraine
This is how it's all begun
And I will tell this story of a true rebellion

The content of these lyrics is also of interest, since it draws on Hütz's Ukrainian background. The song's narrative functions within its punk framework as a 'story of a true rebellion', with the narrator stealing from his mother in order to make his way to the big city. As we know, this has no direct relation to Hütz's own migration, as he left for the USA with his family, but the true story would not work at all well within the parameters of punk. More interesting is the fact that the narrator does not make it all the way to Leningrad, finding himself in the countryside, a setting far removed from the traditionally urban location of punk. However, an awareness of Hütz's initial movement from Kiev allows us to contextualise this; it was in rural Ukraine that his interest in 'gypsy' music developed. He has compared the Carpathian region of Ukraine to New York, saying that he was 'blown away by the flood of different languages and cultures there'⁴, and found the music of this region to be comparable with punk. Successfully reconciling his enthusiasms for punk and 'gypsy' music in his own work obviously involved various attempts, amongst which 'Jung and Crazee' can be counted. The influence of 'gypsy' music is in evidence in this embellished narrative of Hütz's teenage years in the Carpathians, and it is as though this music is lying dormant beneath the punk he played in Vermont.

The song's instrumentation also requires consideration; alongside the distorted guitars, there is a very simple accordion riff. This is far removed from the complexity of the accordion playing that can be seen in Gogol Bordello's work, but it is appropriate to the more stripped back sound of The Fags. Its simplicity is

⁴ Susan Kessler: 'Gypsy Punk Rocker Eugene Hütz', *Passport Magazine*, July 2006
<<http://www.passportmagazine.ru/article/477/>>

such that any 'gypsy' music influence that may account for its inclusion is hidden, but when examined retrospectively it can be seen as a step in the evolution of Gypsy Punk. By the time *Voi-La Intruder* appeared four years later, the influence of 'gypsy' music was far more evident. In 'Nomadic Chronicle' the lyrical references to Ukraine seem more integral to the song, rather than being the throwaway lines they are in 'Jung and Crazee'; this is due to the acoustic musical arrangement, which emphasises the intricacies of the instrumentation, and the 'Hoya paranoia' chorus, which is sung in an impassioned style that is associated with singing in 'gypsy' music. The distorted punk style of *No Fleas* and the acoustic dominated *Voi-La Intruder* are both very different from the music that Gogol Bordello would go on to produce after 2000, but when content from the two records is compared in this way, we can see how 'gypsy' and punk came together. However, punk has come to be an expansive genre and has grown many offshoots, so it is necessary to determine exactly which aspects of punk have found their way into Gypsy Punk, and to consider the extent to which punk is a global form that shares Gogol Bordello's multicultural qualities.

1969 VS. 1977

With its diverse points of reference and self-referential elements, Gypsy Punk can be understood not only as a genre of music but also as a cultural movement, and a precedent for this duality can be found in punk. The word 'punk' can refer to a particular style of music, characterised by short, fast, intense songs with simple structures; but it can also refer to the subculture that developed around this music and its consumers. Accounts of the origin and heyday of punk tend to provide a near-identical narrative. This story begins in 1975 with the formation of the Sex Pistols in London, and generally it charts the rise and fall of this single band, taking in events contemporaneous to their activity. This means that punk is frequently presented not as a movement that came about and continued to develop, but as a momentary occurrence, which was confined to the period between August 1975

and January 1978, when the Sex Pistols were active.⁵ Amongst the other major punk bands who are part of this narrative are The Clash in the UK and the Ramones in the US, but any activity of theirs that occurred outside of this brief period is often presented as an addendum. Yet there are still many who claim that 'punk's not dead', and there is certainly evidence that supports this to be found in the punk bands that have released records and played concerts in more recent years. In fact, Gogol Bordello can be included amongst their number; the audiences at their shows typically include many people who are dressed in styles associated with punk, and who dance in the frenetic pogoing manner typical of punk shows. Essentially, the answer to the question of punk's lifespan depends on what we consider to be punk. It could be argued that it was birthed in the late 1960s by American bands like The Stooges, MC5 and the New York Dolls, and as we have seen, it can be considered to be an extant subculture. However, there is a counterargument that up until 1975 punk was merely in its gestation period, and that since 1978 we have been experiencing not punk itself, but an aftershock that it created.

The perspectives taken in some of the more significant literature on punk should be considered here. Jon Savage's 1991 text *England's Dreaming* is upheld by many as the definitive history of punk, and Savage confines this history to the 1975-78 period. Indeed, the book's subtitle, 'The Sex Pistols and Punk Rock', suggests that these two phenomena go hand in hand. Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons' account of punk, *The Boy Looked at Johnny* also references The Sex Pistols' frontman Johnny Rotten in its title. The subtitle of this book is 'The Obituary of Rock and Roll', and although it was first published in 1978 and therefore cannot take into account any potential resurrections, the implication is that it is not punk but rock 'n' roll that is dead, and that it has been killed and superseded by punk. Stewart Home attempted to provide a fresh perspective in his 1996 book *Cranked Up Really High*. Here, he showed a particular interest in widening the canon of

⁵ I will quite deliberately say very little about the Sex Pistols, as there is a glut of information on and analysis of their work elsewhere. This is not to deny the influence that the Sex Pistols had on punk; however, my focus in this chapter is on the wider culture of punk rather than on any particular bands. Texts that contain further detail include – amongst numerous others: Jon Savage: *England's Dreaming*; Griel Marcus: *Lipstick Traces*; Adrian Boot and Chris Salewicz: *Punk: The Illustrated History of a Music Revolution*; Clinton Heylin: *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*; Fred and Judy Vermorel: *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story*.

punk, referencing less known artists and demonstrating their importance to the movement. In addition, he considered later manifestations of punk, such as Oi! and Riot Grrrl, and showed that there remains much to be considered beyond 1979. However, his perspective followed the convention of anglocentrism that is common to so many other works. As Clinton Heylin has observed, 'Though the history of British punk continues to intrigue sociologists in music critic's clothing, its elder New York cousin [...] has received scant attention.'⁶ Unsurprisingly, it is American commentators, like Heylin, who have provided a more balanced overview of punk.

Since Gogol Bordello are rooted in New York, it might make sense to consider them in the context of the punk movement that came about in that city, but they claim to be influenced by London bands, like The Clash, as much as by American punk acts. In addition, the multinational composition of the band, and the fact that this is something that they choose to stress, means that it is misrepresentative to confine discussions to just one of punk's main locations. As such, it seems most effective to situate Gypsy Punk by comparing the London and New York manifestations of punk. In order to do this, I intend to examine two songs, one from each side of the Atlantic. The Clash are considered to be part of the central era of punk, being close contemporaries of the Sex Pistols and having a very similar style. It is because punk is often thought to have occupied a very brief temporal span that one of the most frequently analysed songs is '1977', the B-Side to The Clash's first single 'White Riot', which was released in that year. '1977' places the attitude of punk directly into its temporal context, opening with the lines, 'In 1977 I hope I go to heaven / Cos I've been too long on the dole / And I can't work at all'. It also includes the refrain, 'No Elvis, Beatles or the Rolling Stones in 1977'. This song can be compared to The Stooges' single '1969', which opened their self-titled debut album from that year. In this song, their singer Iggy Pop complains, 'It's 1969, OK / All across the USA / It's another year for me and you / Another year with nothing to do.' This disaffected sentiment continues into the second verse, in which we hear, 'Now last year I was twenty-one / I didn't have a lot of fun / And now I'm gonna be twenty-two / I say "Oh my" and a "Boo hoo".'

⁶ Clinton Heylin: *From the Velvets to the Voidoids* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.xi.

Evidently, these two songs have very similar functions and messages. Both herald a new year in which there is no change and little hope of such a thing. Iggy Pop's 1969 is 'another year' in which there is nothing to do, while for The Clash's singer Joe Strummer 1977 looks set to be another year on the dole. In both songs there is a great sense of negation: there is nothing to do in 1969, but by 1977 anything that had persisted as far as the end of the 1960s – such as Elvis Presley and The Beatles – is gone. This suggests that 1977 marks a culmination of something that had already started by 1969. Moreover, in '1969' we can see that the primary attitudes of punk are already in place; Roger Sabin defines these in this way:

Philosophically, it had no "set agenda" like the hippy movement that preceded it, but nevertheless stood for identifiable attitudes, among them: an emphasis on negationism (rather than nihilism); a consciousness of class based politics (with a stress on "working-class credibility"); and a belief in spontaneity and "doing it yourself".⁷

In the lyrics of both '1969' and '1977' the first two characteristics of the three listed by Sabin are noticeable. As we have already seen, the primary sentiment of these songs is negation: there is nothing to do. And, particularly in '1977', this is in part dictated by the working class status of the songs' narrators. The jobless protagonist of The Clash's song has his lifestyle constrained by his lack of employment, and the inclusivity of the Stooges' 'another year for me and you' indicates that the song is aimed at a presumably working class majority. As for the third of Sabin's points, 'a belief in spontaneity and "doing it yourself"', this seems to be absent from both songs. Instead, there is a sense of resignation. The DIY ethic of punk is detectable as a subtext, however: both the Stooges and The Clash have, in the absence of anything else to do, written and recorded songs. Sabin's description of punk reveals that there are close similarities between these songs from different times and places, but it also makes clear the fact that Gypsy Punk

⁷ Roger Sabin: 'Introduction', Roger Sabin (ed.): *Punk Rock: So What?* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.3.

does not share the values of punk.

For my purposes, then, there is no need to prolong the perceived lifespan of punk in order to incorporate Gypsy Punk into it. Gypsy Punk is sufficiently distinct from punk that it is not an offshoot, but a separate entity; it is influenced by punk as against being connected to it. Even so, it seems to me preferable to consider punk as an ongoing culture that begins in the late 1960s. This is because of the breadth of the punk influences cited by Gogol Bordello, and the aspects of punk that have been adopted by Gypsy Punk musicians. One example here is Iggy Pop, who led the Stooges from 1968 to 1976 before sustaining a solo career for many years after their breakup, and then reuniting with the band during the past decade. Pop is still best known for the extreme stage personality which he continues to flaunt as he advances through his sixties. He not only pioneered acts of performance such as stage diving, but also actively encouraged the taunts and missiles hurled by audience members, and cut himself with the broken glass that frequently littered the stage. Hütz has cited him as a musical influence, and his performative acts were also clearly a source of inspiration for the theatrical shows of Gogol Bordello's early career, in which Hütz flagellated himself with his microphone and occasionally stubbed out cigarettes on his body.

Further similarities between the two can be observed: while Pop's crowd-surfing might not be regarded as a particularly adventurous feat at a punk show today, Hütz pushes the boundaries further, launching himself into the crowd atop a drum. Like Pop, he performs shirtless, exposing his flesh to any self-inflicted or accidental injuries, and through his lean physique he draws attention to the raw physicality of punk. Writing about Iggy Pop, Steve Waksman has noted that:

[H]is bodily acts, combined with the sonic assault of the Stooges' music, could be taken as an attempt to embody the incoherence of the performance act, to make an impression without conveying a message, perhaps taken as well as a gesture of resistance to the mass-oriented circumstances of early 1970s rock and roll.⁸

⁸ Steve Waksman: *This Ain't the Summer of Love* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), p.101.

This kind of resistance aligns the Stooges with punk, and while they are sometimes considered to be a punk band, they are on other occasions termed 'proto-punk'. Pop is certainly thought of as a punk personality; this is perhaps because of his performance and attitude rather than for his music, but this does not make his punk status any less valid. John Sinclair, the journalist who went on to manage MC5, said of the later Stooges shows, 'Iggy had gone beyond performance – to the point where it really was some kind of psychodrama. It exceeded conventional theatre. He might do *anything*. That was his act.'⁹ So the Stooges are most identifiably punk in their performance and ethos; the style of their music, which is mellower than the hard and fast punk sound of the Sex Pistols and their contemporaries, is less important. Indeed, for many punk bands, the style of the music is less important than the attitude. Consider the famous maxim that appeared in 1976 in the punk zine *Sideburns*: 'This is a chord. This is another. This is a third. Now form a band.'¹⁰ It was not considered necessary to have a developed musical style, or even any great musical ability, to play punk. As such, punk must be permitted and expected to appear in many different guises, and the difference between the Stooges and the Clash is just one example of this difference.

To open a debate concerning whether punk begins in 1969 or 1975 is to set up two other oppositions. The first of these, which is touched on in Sabin's point, is between a middle class 'art rock' which was the product of art school students and which has its origins with The Velvet Underground¹¹, and the more working class subculture that grew around the Sex Pistols and their ilk. The second is the opposition of the United States and the United Kingdom or, more specifically, New York and London. These three sets of opposing factors (time, place and class) can in fact be overlaid on each other to create two different scenes that vie for the attention of punk historians. The most thoroughly documented of these is the working class London movement of the mid 1970s, while the New York 'art rock' of the late 1960s has received less attention in most accounts of punk.

However, all of these oppositions can benefit from reinterpretation, not

⁹ Heylin, p.38.

¹⁰ Cited in Jon Savage: *England's Dreaming* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.280.

¹¹ See Heylin: *From the Velvets to the Voidoids* for an explanation of The Velvet Underground's place in the punk canon.

least those concerned with class. In his examination of subcultures and style, Dick Hebdige refers closely to the style of punk and the connections with class that it signifies. In an overview of punk style, he writes, 'Punk reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth cultures in 'cut up' form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs.'¹² Discussing the political and philosophical influences of punk, he mentions the poetic sources of American artists such as Patti Smith and Richard Hell, and says that in contrast, 'British punk bands, generally younger and more self-consciously proletarian, remained largely innocent of literature.'¹³ The suggestion here is clearly that British punk is a working class movement, but that class was signified in an ambiguous way: the outward appearance of punk made it difficult to tell whether or not one class was masquerading as another. This is reinforced later on in Hebdige's book:

Punk claimed to speak for the neglected constituency of white lumpen youth, but it did so typically in the stilted language of glam and glitter rock – 'rendering' working classness metaphorically in chains and hollow cheeks, 'dirty' clothing [...] and rough and ready diction. [...] Despite its proletarian accents, punk's rhetoric was steeped in irony.¹⁴

So class is not something that is engrained within punk, but is something that is communicated through style. Indeed, some of British punk's major figures were less working class than they made out. While the Sex Pistols were from genuinely working class backgrounds, the same cannot be said of The Clash. Joe Strummer was the son of a diplomat, and had a middle class upbringing, while his colleagues Mick Jones and Paul Simonon had both attended the traditionally middle class institution of the art school – though this did not mean that they were restricted to playing 'art-rock'.

In America, meanwhile, the 'art-rock' of Patti Smith and Television was not

¹² Dick Hebdige: *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p.26.

¹³ Hebdige, p.27.

¹⁴ Hebdige, p.63.

the only force behind punk. Heylin has pointed out that 'If the Velvets can be considered to have fathered art-rock, then Detroit's two chief rock exponents, the MC5 and the Stooges, represented a more primitive tradition – rock & roll as the people's music'.¹⁵ In addition, it is worth noting that there were occasions when the two collided. For example, the Stooges' eponymous album was produced by The Velvet Underground's John Cale, and the droning nine minute long 'We Will Fall', which was shot through with Cale's trademark viola, acted as an art-rock interlude in this proletarian record. So it can be clearly observed that punk was a product of both working class and middle class influences; however, it is a fallacy that there was a division between the two that was aligned with the Atlantic Ocean.

There are further similarities and overlaps between the punk of the UK and the USA. For example, the sound of the Ramones is far closer to that of the Sex Pistols than to The Velvet Underground. Their work is more concerned with speed and power than with arty experimentation. Yet they predate the Sex Pistols, having made their debut in March 1974. Heylin has noted that, 'the New York and London scenes shared similar antecedents, reflecting a common disenchantment with the rock & roll status quo'¹⁶ and the fact that these two relatively contemporaneous bands were performing such closely comparable music can be upheld as evidence for this point. Heylin adds that:

A second difference between the British and American punk scenes was their relative gestation periods. The British weekly music press was reviewing Sex Pistols shows less than three months after their cacophonous debut. [...] The CBGBs scene went largely ignored by the American music industry until 1976 – two years after the debuts of Television, the Ramones and Blondie.¹⁷

Essentially, the timeframe in which punk operated in New York was very different to the one that governed punk in London. The speed at which the history of the British punk movement unfolded was as fast as the music itself, while in America

¹⁵ Heylin, p.32.

¹⁶ Heylin, p.xi.

¹⁷ Heylin, p.xiv.

events occurred at a more leisurely pace. While punk reached its zenith in Sex Pistols era London, it had already been charging up across the Atlantic for several years. This had been a silent build up, however, as American punk remained underground until around 1976; and while it did emerge into popular consciousness at this time, it never became a mass cultural event in the same way that punk did in the UK. It is for this reason that the frenetic sequence of events based around mid 1970s London have become the preferred version of punk history.

Despite this, Gypsy Punk is certainly closer to the punk of New York – something we might expect, given that the genre originated in that city. This is obvious in terms of place, but Gypsy Punk is also comparable with New York punk in terms of time and class. Regarding time, it is of course a contemporary style, but the wide range of its punk influences means that it can be seen as following in a tradition of punk that is more American than British. Equally important, however, is the tradition of ‘gypsy’ music, which is not tied to any era, and can be thought of as essentially timeless. Regarding class, it is more difficult to confirm that Gypsy Punk is a middle class art school style rather than a working class movement, though its adoption of global musical genres means that it might be aligned with the avantgarde. But the social class of Gogol Bordello’s musicians is not obvious, and I would argue that this is due to their position as immigrants. Hütz, for example, cannot be described as having either a working class or a middle class background; this is because he grew up in the USSR, a socialist environment into which the class system of the capitalist west cannot easily be transposed. Since Gogol Bordello are defined more strongly by their immigrant status than by class, Gypsy Punk is not directly aligned with any class.

There are similarities to be found in the infrastructures of the British and American strains of punk, and immigrant connections are brought to the fore when these are considered. In both cases, the movement was associated with particular locations. In New York the epicentre was the Lower East Side, which had been adopted as a home by several generations of immigrants: first Irish, then Russians and East Europeans, many of whom were Jewish. In London, one of the areas most associated with punk was Notting Hill; also an area associated with immigrant

communities, in this case West Indians. There were also particular venues where punk bands held their shows, such as the 100 Club on Oxford Street and The Roxy in Covent Garden; and the CBGB on New York's Bowery. In the same way that immigrants adopt certain locations, these settings were generally adopted by punk, rather than having been set up for the purpose of staging punk shows. The Roxy had formerly been a gay club, and CBGB stood for Country, Bluegrass and Blues. However, the famous DIY ethic of punk meant that such places were seen as being very much open to reclamation and reuse in other capacities.

The fact that punk was often located in areas with high immigrant populations is of course significant to Gypsy Punk. It is not mere coincidence that Gogol Bordello also found their initial success in the Lower East Side. The first wave of Gypsy Punk fans was largely comprised of second generation immigrants from Ukraine and other East European countries.¹⁸ If CBGB was the home of the New York punk of The Ramones and Blondie, then its contemporary Gypsy Punk equivalent is the Mehanata, a Bulgarian bar that has become known for holding Gypsy Punk shows and parties. This is another Lower East Side venue, located not far from CBGB on Ludlow Street. Even before its closure in 2006, CBGB achieved legendary status, spawning its own range of merchandise and becoming a New York tourist attraction. Although Mehanata has not reached this level of repute, it has nonetheless been mythologised to some degree within the Gypsy Punk community, largely because when Eugene Hütz was living in New York he DJ'ed there regularly when he was not on tour with Gogol Bordello. However, Rebecca Jablonsky notes that the mythology of the Mehanata is to some degree based on stereotyping:

Mehanata's claim to Eastern European authenticity therefore involves promoting the heavy consumption of vodka (a stereotypically Russian trait), and gypsy performances that connote lawlessness and freedom and create an environment where people who perhaps peripherally identify as part of a cultural group such as "Russian," "Eastern European," or "Jewish" can articulate their

¹⁸ Cited by Eugene Hütz in the film *Gogol Bordello Non-Stop* (dir. Margareta Jimeno, 2008).

identities, while joining in the performance of being a wild and wandering gypsy.¹⁹

Although the traits stereotypically associated with the Roma and with Eastern European migrants are evident in the presentation of the Mehanata, Jablonsky acknowledges that it functions as a place where specific identities can be established and reinforced. Indeed, if Gypsy Punk is thought to have any kind of fixed home, then the Mehanata fulfils this role.

PUNK AND REGGAE

The relationship between punk and immigrant communities in areas such as Notting Hill and the Lower East Side was reinforced by the links that were forged between punk and forms of music from these communities. The development of Gypsy Punk is by no means the first instance of punk taking on the influence of global styles. The first and best known of these connections was between punk and reggae, leading former NME journalists Burchill and Parsons to comment that 'punk junked up any Rastafarian connection it could score, becoming so addicted to Rasta *in toto* that throughout 1977 and 1978 every "punk" show was preceded by interminable Rasta music.'²⁰ This was certainly the case at the Roxy, where the resident DJ was reggae enthusiast Don Letts, who is said to have played this style of music because there were not yet enough punk records. Boot and Salewicz say that:

At the time reggae was considered by a select few to be the only interesting music around. As a consequence of Letts' record choices, he helped set in motion the celebrated punk-reggae fusion which would find its most ardent interpretations in the music of the Clash and be celebrated later in the year in Bob Marley's

¹⁹ Rebecca Jablonsky: 'Russian Jews and "Gypsy Punks": The Performance of Real and Imagined Cultural Identities within a Cultural Migrant Group', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Volume 24, Issue 1, p.8.

²⁰ Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons: *The Boy Looked at Johnny: The Obituary of Rock and Roll* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p.89.

‘Punky Reggae Party’.²¹

The Clash were initially based in Camden but, according to Marcus Gray, they ‘were encouraged to make much of their association with Notting Hill and Brixton, areas with transitory, strongly immigrant populations, in order to enhance their street credibility.’²² However, there may have been deeper links between punk and reggae than those forged by DJs like Letts and promoted by the management of punk bands like The Clash. This is an idea that has been examined in depth by Hebdige, who sets the tone for the connection in pointing out that in the summer of 1976, at the time when punk was emerging, the Notting Hill Carnival degenerated into a riot. The Clash’s first single, ‘White Riot’, in which Joe Strummer demands ‘a riot of my own’, was inspired by this event. According to Hebdige, ‘punk and the black British subcultures with which reggae is associated were connected at a deep structural level’.²³ This was due to the pattern of immigration from Jamaica to Britain in the post-war period, and the interactions that had developed between these West Indian immigrants and the indigenous population.²⁴ In addition, when punk and reggae are compared on a musical level, a similarity can be discerned. Although the aggressive, accelerated sound of punk is very different from the mellow, languorous reggae, they have in common the fact that they are both defiantly different from the dominant forms of rock ‘n’ roll and R ‘n’ B (which are closely related). This means that reggae was in fact highly relevant to punk and was an appropriate style to play at punk shows.

However, Roger Sabin has suggested that:

there is evidence that the union could be a superficial one – and that the ‘punk reggae party’ was not that well attended. [...] For example, notwithstanding the success of Marley, reggae albums

²¹ Adrian Boot and Chris Salewicz: *Punk: The Illustrated History of a Music Revolution* (London: Studio, 1997), p.59.

²² Marcus Gray: *Route 19 Revisited: The Clash and London Calling* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2010), p.46.

²³ Hebdige, p.29.

²⁴ For further detail about the consumption of reggae music and culture by Britain’s white population, see Hebdige pp.35-45 and Simon Jones: *Black Culture, White Youth* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988), pp.87-118.

sold in miniscule amounts [...and...] press coverage of the scene was correspondingly thin [...]. Even when space was given over, the response from (punk) readers could be hostile, as the almost weekly letters of complaint to *Sounds* bear testimony. Similarly, most bands refused to touch reggae [...and...] likewise most club DJs ignored it – contrary to legend – while on the national airwaves, John Peel, who played as much as he could, received what he's called 'sackloads' of hate mail.²⁵

This may indicate that reggae and punk did not share a fanbase, but even if this was the case, there were certainly reggae connections in the production of punk, and punk musicians like Johnny Rotten did listen to reggae. The punk band with the strongest reggae connection was undoubtedly The Clash: according to Strummer this connection was 'really crucial to the whole scene. It would have been piffle without that.'²⁶ Reggae was played before their shows by DJ Scratchy²⁷, The Clash's tour DJ from 1978 to 1980, and its noticeably off-beat style was incorporated into their music. This sound became even more prominent as The Clash evolved; Boot and Salewicz state that, 'By the time they played Bond's in Manhattan in 1981 [...] much of the set seemed to consist of sprawling dub, as though you were listening to a sound system in one of London's Jamaican shebeens.'²⁸ If punk is regarded as a brief phenomenon that took place between 1976 and 1979, then perhaps the reggae connection is minimal, but if it is considered to be a more longstanding genre, then reggae is clearly important to it.

In The Clash's early singles, however, an interest in the culture and music of London's Jamaican population was already evident. 'White Riot' was inspired by the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival and can be read as a signal of solidarity with the West Indian population: Gray has written, 'It was intended to be to the "black riot" of late Seventies Notting Hill what the White Panthers had been to the Black

²⁵ Roger Sabin: "'I won't let that Dago by': Rethinking punk and racism', Roger Sabin (ed.): *Punk Rock: So What?*, p.205.

²⁶ Joe Strummer in the film *Westway to the World* (dir. Don Letts, 2000.)

²⁷ DJ Scratchy now plays a mixture of reggae and world music on his radio show *Scratchy Sounds*. His repertoire in fact extends as far as Gypsy Punk, and he toured with Gogol Bordello in 2007.

²⁸ Boot and Salewicz, p.73.

Panthers in the late Sixties: a gesture of support, while acknowledging a difference in experience.’²⁹ However, it was in the single ‘(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais’, which was released in 1978, that the interplay between reggae and punk was most effectively considered. This song is an account of an all-night reggae concert at the Hammersmith Palais that Strummer attended. The event was clearly met with great anticipation: Strummer sings, ‘If they’ve got anything to say / there’s many black ears here to listen.’ However, he is disappointed to find that ‘onstage they ain’t got no roots rock rebel’ – they are more concerned with pleasing their audience in an immediate sense than with offering any of the sense of rebellion he had inferred from reggae records. The song then goes on to comment on a wide range of other social and political issues. There is also criticism of punk: ‘Punk rockers in the UK / They won’t notice anyway / They’re all too busy fighting / For a good place under the lighting.’

The use of a combination of punk and reggae is the perfect vehicle for this statement. ‘(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais’ has a crashing introduction that is played in a punk style, but this quickly gives way to the steady guitar strokes of reggae as the lineup of the concert is described. When the criticism of the performance begins the punk sound returns: the implication is that while this reggae show does not have the intent that it ought to, punk does. But the reggae pattern then returns, as Strummer broadens his field of attack, singing, ‘White youth, black youth, better find another solution’. Here we find The Clash injecting into reggae what that they had found lacking at the Hammersmith gig. By playing a combination of punk and reggae, the sense of defiance that was thought to be a part of both was compounded. A cyclical motion that intensified as it revolved was thus instigated: the insurgent overtones of reggae were pumped into punk, which then lent its stronger sentiment back to reggae, and so on. Discussing this trade of influence, Joseph Heathcott has said that ‘white working-class British youth in urban centers such as London and Manchester found themselves increasingly exhausted by a stagnant economy and alienated by a remote national political life. They took cues in rebellion and cultural resistance from black working-class

²⁹ Gray, p.38.

youth—mostly Jamaicans and other islanders.’³⁰ His view of the foundation of punk in Britain is that:

Bands such as the Sex Pistols and the Clash used these raw materials to forge a new movement, blending the energy and pace of American punk with the underground outlaw identities of black British youth culture and music. In the process, these bands created an intensely aggressive and confrontational music and performance culture that had a profound effect on American popular music in the late 1970s and into the 1980s.³¹

The British punk that has come to dominate study of the genre is from this perspective seen to be – like ‘gypsy’ music – a hybrid form, which, as we have seen, has come about as the result of an interplay between different cultures. Heathcott’s statement also differentiates effectively between British and American punk, supporting the idea that the latter did emerge first, and convincingly claiming that the former amalgamated the aesthetics of the latter and of Jamaican music and culture. The influence of reggae on American punk has in fact extended beyond the 1980s, with more contemporary punk bands such as NOFX and Rancid continuing to propagate the connection. In addition, reggae makes prominent contributions to Gypsy Punk. This is apparent in some of their songs: on the 2007 album *Super Taranta*, ‘Tribal Connection’ is played in a reggae style, while ‘Dub the Frequencies of Love’, which, as its title suggests, is informed by dub reggae, includes in its lyrics the declaration, ‘music from a tiny island takes over the world’.

Furthermore, Hütz has stated on more than one occasion that he finds ‘gypsy’ music and reggae comparable, describing how they both originated with poor people who had nothing to lose.³² Therefore ‘gypsy’ music may be seen as being linked with Gypsy Punk in the same way that reggae had connections with

³⁰ Joseph Heathcott: ‘Urban Spaces and Working-Class Expressions across the Black Atlantic: Tracing the Routes of Ska’, *Radical History Review*, Issue 87 (Fall 2003), p.200.

³¹ Heathcott, p.200.

³² ‘Gypsy Punks’, *16 Blocks Magazine*, Issue 1 (October 2007), p.15. & ‘Gogol Bordello Biography’, *Contact Music*, <http://www.contactmusic.com/info/gogol_bordello>

the first wave of punk. If reggae was appealing to punks in London in the 1970s because it symbolised a marginalised group speaking out against their marginalisation, then 'gypsy' music holds the same appeal for Gogol Bordello and their contemporaries. However, the popularity of reggae has not declined since it first reached outside of its West Indian consumer base, and as such it retains a presence in many recent forms of punk, including Gypsy Punk. This is acknowledged in the song 'Underdog World Strike', when Hütz sings, 'Be it punk, hip-hop, be it a reggae sound / It is all connected through the gypsy part of town'. This suggests a very self-conscious hybridity, of which the use of reggae is a part, but the embedded influence of reggae that impacts upon much punk means that it is doubly significant.

What is most important is the fact that reggae is an immigrant music, and as such it sets a kind of precedent for Gypsy Punk. But whereas the roots of reggae are exclusively West Indian, Gypsy Punk brings together forms of music that have disparate origins. Gogol Bordello consciously use 'gypsy' music and references to the Roma in order to associate themselves with the Romani people, and it is arguable that punk took the same approach with reggae. Simon Jones has described 'Punk's attempt to express an affinity with Rasta and reggae culture by subverting the symbols of nationalism, [...] and by drawing parallels between the experience of racism and the position of dispossessed whites in songs like 'White Riot'³³. In Gypsy Punk, the parallels are between the immigrant experience and the position of the Roma, whose collective identity does not function within parameters based on national difference. However, it is not only the Roma and their music that inform Gypsy Punk; it is presented as a global form that responds to many different cultures. In order to understand the extent of this, we now consider some of the precedents and parallels of Gypsy Punk that have come about in the wake of punk.

³³ Simon Jones: *Black Culture, White Youth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.100.

We have already addressed Gogol Bordello's position with regard to time, place and class. In briefly examining reggae, we have also begun to address the relationship that punk has with the music of immigrant communities: however, it is now necessary to go further, by considering punk as a global form that resonates far beyond London or New York. Describing his discovery of punk in the 1980s, Stephen Duncombe recalls that it seemed to provide 'a space for young Whites growing up in a multicultural world to figure out what it meant to be White'³⁴. He paraphrases Hebdige, stating that 'punk, in its first incarnations, was an attempt by young Whites, dissatisfied with the world they were born into, to grab and forge a new ethnicity for themselves.'³⁵ But as Duncombe goes on to point out, punk should not be understood as a solely white or Western form of music: the early influence of reggae proves that there has long been a greater range in punk than is often thought, and this is something that has only broadened as punk has continued to evolve. Although punk originated in the UK and the USA, it is now audible all over the world. This can be discerned from a brief glance at the catalogue of global punk record label Tian An Men 89 Records, which includes music from places as diverse as Nepal, Madagascar, Indonesia and Uzbekistan.³⁶

It is arguable that the increasing accessibility of the wider world, brought about by advances in the technologies of travel and communication, means that this is the case for punk as much as it is for all other forms of music and culture. However, Alan O'Connor argues:

It is not clear that postmodern theories of global flow are needed in order to explain how punk travels around the globe. Punk is an international movement and the conduits are fairly obvious. Zines such as *Profane Existence* almost always have articles on scenes in various countries and lists of contact addresses.

³⁴ Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay: 'White Riot?', Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay (eds.): *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* (London: Verso, 2011), p.5.

³⁵ Duncombe and Tremblay, p.5.

³⁶ *Tian an Men 89 Records website* <<http://tam89records.com/home.html>>

Records and tapes are sent in the mail. Punks are great letter writers and travellers. Visitors are generally welcomed and often helped with meals and places to stay.³⁷

This position aligns the global spread of punk with its DIY aesthetic; O'Connor indicates that it is punk itself, rather than any external influences, that has configured its international presence. Additionally, the suggestions that punks are keen travellers who will welcome visitors warmly recalls Hütz's claim that his identification as a Rom means that he is offered hospitality by Romani people worldwide, and indicates that there may be similarities between the Roma and punk community which make the combination of 'gypsy' and 'punk' an appropriate marriage.

We can see from the example of reggae, and of course with Gypsy Punk, that in spite of its apparent desire to be outside of mainstream culture, punk has generally been very open to external influences both musical and cultural. This produces a kind of tension in that punk is closed off yet also receptive to elements from beyond its own culture. It is as though certain forms of music from outside are deemed suitable to be brought into its fold. While some recent punk has embraced elements from pop music and successfully reached very wide audiences in doing so, the styles with which punk has generally chosen to associate itself tend also to come from marginalised cultures – such as Jamaican immigrants and the Roma. However, it should be noted that the exchange between punk and immigrants is not unidirectional: while punk draws on immigrant cultures, some migrants are attracted to the punk of the countries they settle in. Duncombe and Tremblay describe encountering a group of Polish punks in New York:

Punk with its Anglo-American lineage and the dominance of English, must have also been something foreign to them, something alluring, something "Other". It, we imagine, was a way to rebel (against their Polish parents) to assimilate (into this new

³⁷ Alan O'Connor: 'Punk and Globalization: Mexico City and Toronto', Paul Kennedy and Victor Roudometof (eds): *Communities Across Borders: New Immigrants and Transnational Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.152.

English-speaking world), and rebel once again (against mainstream America). It was a more complicated punk experience than our own.³⁸

We might imagine that Hütz and the other immigrant members of Gogol Bordello will have a similarly complicated punk experience. This complexity may be compounded when we consider that the global spread of punk means that they will have encountered the genre before migrating. Influenced by the new sound from the UK and the USA, punk bands formed in most countries in Western Europe during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it was not too long before underground punk movements began to develop in some countries in the communist controlled East. The spread of punk in Eastern European countries was dictated by a number of factors; not least of these was the impositions of their governments.

While punk culture was vilified in many states, it had more opportunities to develop in others. Alex Kan and Nick Hayes note that in Poland, punk took off after the imposition of martial law by Wojciech Jaruzelski in 1981, suggesting that music was perhaps not considered to be a serious threat to the regime.³⁹ This change in politics may have meant that people were encouraged to produce some form of cultural resistance. The USSR was far less penetrable, but punk nonetheless made its way through its borders, initially in Estonia, where linguistic similarities with Finnish provided easier access to Western culture.⁴⁰ Punk in the Eastern Bloc manifested itself in two ways: the distribution of bootlegged recordings of Western punk, and the formation of East European punk bands. The young Hütz accessed punk through both means, consuming bootlegs and Western radio broadcasts, and forming his own band in Kiev as a teenager. However, it seems that Western rock and punk was far more influential on Hütz than its Eastern European counterparts: the influences that he now cites include many bands from Russia and Eastern Europe, but most of these play more traditional music.

³⁸ Duncombe and Tremblay, p.15.

³⁹ Alex Kan and Nick Hayes: 'Big Beat in Poland', Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.): *Rocking the State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp.41-53.

⁴⁰ Sabrina Petra Ramet, Sergei Zamascikov and Robert Bird: 'The Soviet Rock Scene', Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.): *Rocking the State*, pp.181-218.

When external musical influences are added to punk within countries that have adopted punk after exposure to its Western forms, we find a double-layering of outside influence: to the already external form of punk, another kind of music is applied. This can be seen in the case of the Russian group Leningrad, which formed in St. Petersburg in the late 1990s, and disbanded around ten years later. Leningrad's punk was augmented with elements of ska, the Jamaican form that predates reggae, and which is characterised by its use of brass instruments. In the same way that reggae has been connected with punk from its earliest incarnations, ska was first incorporated into punk in the early 1980s in the UK. Leningrad's use of ska is particularly interesting because they have come to be associated with Gypsy Punk. Their upbeat, brassy sound, which is associated with certain forms of 'gypsy' music, presumably contributes to this; a more significant reason, however, is the fact that their music featured on the soundtrack to *Everything is Illuminated*, the film that raised the profile of Gogol Bordello. The two bands therefore share a fanbase in the West, and Leningrad have come to be associated with Gypsy Punk, even though there is nothing 'gypsy' about their music. In a way, they have become Gypsy Punk simply because they are Russian.

For Western audiences there is also a more general sense of the exotic; while the guttural Russian singing of Leningrad's singer Sergei Shnurov may be incomprehensible to most fans in the West, this is part of the appeal. To those in Russia who understand the words there is also an appeal in what is being sung: Leningrad make prominent use in their lyrics of Russian *mat*, a form of sexual slang based around four vulgar words.⁴¹ *Mat* is generally subject to censorship in Russia, so Leningrad's use of this patois can be likened to the Sex Pistols' infamous outburst of profanity during a broadcast of the TV programme *Today* in December 1976. Moreover, Leningrad were banned from playing shows in Moscow by the city's mayor.⁴² In the same way that the notoriety of early punk was partially informed by this incident, the reputation of Leningrad is derived from the language they sing in. This is the case both within Russia and outside it: in the home

⁴¹ The four words in question are блядь (*blyad*: whore); ебать (*ebat*: fuck); пизда (*pidza*: cunt); хуй (*khuy*: penis). The designation *mat*, meaning 'mother', derives from the commonplace expression еб твою мать (*Yob tvoyu mat*: fuck your mother).

⁴² Birigt Beumers: *Pop Culture Russia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2005), p.232.

country, their use of *mat* contributes significantly to their image, while abroad the fact that they sing in Russian is more of a defining feature.

Gogol Bordello's multilingual lyrics not only draw attention to the immigrant backgrounds of the majority of the band's members, but also serve as signifiers of the global extent of punk's territory. They are not the only musicians to use multiple languages within a punk framework: perhaps the best known artist to do so is the Franco-Spanish musician Manu Chao – an influence on Gogol Bordello⁴³ – who is often cited in support of the idea of punk's vivacity and its ability to engage with other cultures. Speaking about punk and its commodification, music writer Vivien Goldman has said that although the aesthetic of punk has become commodified, Chao 'is one of the punkiest artists out there I can think of. It's an *inclusionary* spirit that is punk.'⁴⁴ Goldman's point is that Chao's involvement with punk goes beyond the purely aesthetic and extends to an engagement with political and social issues on a global scale. This kind of 'inclusionary spirit' is something that Chao shares with Gogol Bordello, both musically and politically. Neither confines themselves to just one or two genres, but are open to the use of many. Additionally, they both address marginalised cultures: Chao's first significant musical activity was with the band Mano Negra, a leftist punk group described by Josh Kun as 'a wandering gaggle of Europe's Others – Spanish refugees, North American immigrants, *gitanos*.'⁴⁵

His engagement with those who are marginalised continued during his solo career, which began after the disbandment of Mano Negra in 1995. Josh Kun has noted that 'Chao's subjects are disenfranchised world citizens who have found themselves caught between the contradictory pulls of globalization: increased prosperity for some, increased labor exploitation for others; increased freedom of movement for some, increased barriers and expulsions for others.'⁴⁶ The Roma can certainly be thought of as some of these 'disenfranchised world citizens', and

⁴³ The most obvious indicator of Manu Chao's influence on Gogol Bordello is the cover version of the Mano Negra song 'Mala Vida' that Gogol Bordello recorded for this 2004 EP *East Infection*.

⁴⁴ David Shankbone: 'Vivien Goldman: An Interview with the Punk Professor', *Wikinews*, 3 October 2007 <http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Vivien_Goldman:_An_interview_with_the_Punk_Professor>

⁴⁵ Josh Kun: 'Esperando La Última Ola / Waiting for the Last Wave: Manu Chao and the Music of Globalization', Deborah Pacini Hernandez, Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Eric Zolov: *Rockin' Las Americas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latin/o America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), p.332.

⁴⁶ Kun, p.336.

Gogol Bordello's support of Roma Rights can thus be compared with Manu Chao's stance.' He has also stated his support for radical Mexican group the Zapatistas, and has performed gigs with the flag of disputed African nation Western Sahara draped over the stage: this is comparable to the use of the Romani flag by Gogol Bordello, although the cultural connection between Chao and Western Sahara is more oblique. In general, Chao's allegiances are less specific than Gogol Bordello's, and his support for a multitude of causes has not doubt contributed to the fact that he is regarded as a particularly inclusive musician.

As we know, Gogol Bordello introduce an array of sounds to their punk foundations, and Chao utilises a similarly broad palette of influences. There are elements in his music that might be described as 'gypsy' music, as well as substantial helpings of reggae. While Gogol Bordello have described their sound as Gypsy Punk, Chao's equivalent self-designation is *Patchanka*, which was the title of Manu Negra's 1988 debut album. This term has since been understood to stand for the fusion of styles that has been evident in all of Chao's subsequent work. Elysabeth Senra de Oliveira has described the *Patchanka* sound as 'a mixture of rock, ska, flamenco, salsa and rai', and notes that, 'In addition, we can observe the presence of rhythms from Spain, France and North Africa.'⁴⁷ In the same way that Gogol Bordello's adoption of 'gypsy' music sounds draws attention to their identification with marginalised people, Chao's stylistic choices are as political as they are aesthetic. de Oliveira observes that 'Although he remains an inhabitant of the First World, he is sometimes considered to be a singer who adopts a Third World identity.'⁴⁸ This is most apparent in his 1998 album *Clandestino*, his first solo record, which contains many of his best known songs.

Clandestino deals generally with the issue of immigration and particularly with the figure of the 'clandestino' or illegal immigrant. The issues of globalisation and the fates of oppressed groups, which have so often been central to Chao's music, are present here in a highly concentrated form. In particular, the title track provides a portrait of an illegal immigrant; de Oliveira likens it to 'the personal

⁴⁷ Elysabeth Senra de Oliveira: *Moviendo los engranes: Discurso, Música y Política a partir de los 90* (San Juan: Isla Negra, 2007), p.66.

⁴⁸ Senra de Oliveira, p.69.

statement of an immigrant.’⁴⁹ This ‘clandestino’ figure is comparable with the narrator of some of Gogol Bordello’s songs, many of which deal with the immigrant experience. Their first album, *Voi-La Intruder* was divided into two sections, with the first of these being entitled ‘Songs of Immigration in Voi-La Minor’. However, the album as whole forms a loose concept album based around a fantastical Slavic country called Hützovina. This country appears to be the setting for the song ‘Passport’, whose narrator repeatedly announces to an unyielding border guard that he has a passport: ‘I’ve got a passport, officer / This time you ain’t getting what you want.’⁵⁰ The next track, ‘Greencard Husband’ seems to be narrated from the migrant’s destination country. He describes marrying a Chinese lesbian for visa reasons – ‘She needed bad to stay in the country / I needed bad her dough’ – but he finds himself unpaid, and living ‘in a half-bedroom apartment / With six other lesbos.’

Gogol Bordello’s use of humour and their deployment of an imagined country might indicate that Gypsy Punk seeks to distance itself from the actualities of migration, but their songs do in fact reflect the issues that immigrants face. However, Manu Chao’s ‘clandestino’ is grounded more closely in the experiences of migrants, specifically illegal immigrants. The narrator of *Clandestino*’s title track, which opens the album, says ‘Correr es mi destino / Para burlar la ley’ (To run is my destiny / To flout the law’). He continues, ‘Me dicen el clandestino / Por no llevar papel’ (‘They call me ‘clandestino’ / For having no papers’). This draws attention to both the way that immigrants are perceived by inhabitants of the countries that they are trying to enter, and to the absurdity of the situation in which paperwork carries more authority than a human being. The migrant of ‘Clandestino’ becomes totally placeless, neither a part of the country he has left nor the country he is trying to enter: ‘Pa una ciudad del norte / Yo me fui a trabajar / Mi vida la dejé / Entra Ceuta y Gibraltar’ (‘To a city in the north / I went away to work / I left my life / Between Ceuta and Gibraltar’). Here, the ‘clandestino’ is not simply caught between two places, but, as de Oliveira has said of Chao, he straddles the first and third worlds, between the African location of Ceuta and the British

⁴⁹ Senra de Oliveira, p.71.

⁵⁰ Hützovina is examined more thoroughly, and within the context of fictional Balkan countries, in Chapter Five.

territory of Gibraltar. This sense of being placeless continues into *Clandestino*'s second track, 'Desaparecido', in which the narrator says, 'Me llaman el desaparecido / Que cuando llega ya se ha ido' ('They call me the disappeared / When he arrives he's already gone'). He also describes himself as 'Fantasma que nunca está' ('A ghost who's never there'), and 'Destinado a nunca llegar' ('Destined never to arrive').

de Oliveira addresses these two songs using Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of territorialisation and nomadology. These notions were originally intended as a means of describing state and social forces and resistance to these, but de Oliveira puts them to a use that is closer to the literal meanings of the terms Deleuze and Guattari use. She writes that 'The 'clandestino' of the first song seems to find an escape in the 'disappeared' of the second composition on the CD. The person seems to transform into a war machine and in doing so acquires power. His power consists exactly of his destiny: he is destined never to arrive'.⁵¹ In Deleuze and Guattari, the 'war machine' is comprised of the nomadic powers that oppose and resist the state; de Oliveira's is that as the 'clandestino' moves towards becoming 'desaparecido', this figure changes from being an immigrant to being a nomad. As an illegal immigrant he is powerless and placeless, being attached neither to his origin point nor to his destination. As a nomad he is also placeless, but nomadic status is something that is adopted rather than imposed. The nomad therefore has a kind of power; since he is deterritorialised, he cannot be controlled. Manu Chao's 'desaparecido' achieves this kind of deterritorialisation; with his fluid identity he is able to escape the structures of power that put the 'clandestino' in such a fraught position.

Although Gogol Bordello's album *Voi-La Intruder* deals with the travails of immigrant experience in a very different way to *Clandestino*, their more recent work has taken an approach similar to Chao's. In Chapter One we considered the 'nomadic forces' presented by Gogol Bordello in their song 'Trans-Continental Hustle', which appears on their album of the same name, concluding that these forces are empowered due their nomadic state. On the same album, the song 'Immigraniada' describes immigrants who are said to be 'coming rougher every

⁵¹ Senra de Oliveira, p.75

time'; an enhanced ability to survive and resist is implicit in this roughness. However, like *Clandestino*, 'Immigraniada' also includes reportage of the less empowered side of the immigrant experience. Lyrics include, 'All my life I pack-unpack, but man, I got to earn this buck / I gotta pay representation to be accepted in the nation / Where after efforts of a hero, welcome, start again from zero.' This evidently describes a migrant who has made multiple migrations, and who retains none of the fiscal or cultural capital gained from each move. The idea that the immigrant is 'coming rougher every time' suggests that with each migration made, the immigrant's journey becomes less about the places reached and more about the travel between them.

Gogol Bordello's immigrant figure thus becomes a nomad who is outside the power structures of territorialisation, and who resists the control of the state. As we can see from the work of Manu Chao and Gogol Bordello, the nomad is a figure who is particularly suited to punk. The immigrant connections that are so integral to punk's development, but which are sometimes forgotten, mean that a sense of displacement is an important part of punk; this becomes all the more central when the subject matter turns to subjects like immigration. Moreover, in an increasingly globalised world in which bureaucratic difficulties may present more of an obstacle to travelling between far-flung places than the actual process of travel, movement and migration are likely to be addressed more and more by punk, as its resistance evolves. Gogol Bordello's interpretation of punk, which addresses such topical issues while drawing on music from many different sources, is therefore particularly pertinent in the global climate of the present day. However, the relevance of Gypsy Punk cannot be confirmed until its underlying philosophy is understood; we move on to address this in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Gypsy Punk Revolution: from manifesto to *Multi Kontra Culti*

A MANIFESTO

Perhaps the most crucial moment in the narrative of Gogol Bordello is the point when they come to self-identify as Gypsy Punk. This is important not only in the history of the band central to the movement, but also in that of the movement itself, which only began to accelerate and flourish after Gogol Bordello had placed themselves firmly at its epicentre. There had been fleeting references to Gypsy Punk before the formation of Gogol Bordello: the term was applied to artists such as the now defunct French Romani band Les Negresses Vertes, and The No-Smoking Orchestra, the band helmed by filmmaker Emir Kusturica. However, it was only after the epithet 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret', which quoted Hütz's description of the band, was used in the headline of a *New York Times* article about Gogol Bordello that usage of the term 'Gypsy Punk' really proliferated. This article appeared in April 2002, when Gogol Bordello were promoting their involvement in the Whitney Museum of American Art's biennial. The museum's programme guide stated that 'Their work combines Gypsy, Slavic and punk-rock music traditions, as well as cabaret and street culture,' and one of their performances at the biennial was entitled 'Transylvanian Rural Avant-Hard (Occurrence on the Border)'¹. The artist's statement Gogol Bordello made for their appearance at the Whitney's biennial elucidates what they consider Gypsy Punk to be, and is a useful starting point as we attempt to define Gypsy Punk. It was later published on Gogol Bordello's website, a handwritten text on a crumpled piece of paper that suggests

¹ Whitney Museum of American Art: *Whitney Biennial 2002 Program Guide*, 2002.

that the document has been discarded and then recovered.

According to their statement:

Gogol Bordello's task is to provoke audience out of post-modern aesthetic swamp onto a neo-optimistic communal movement towards new sources of authentic energy. With acts of music, theatre, chaos and sorcery, Gogol Bordello confronts the jaded and irony-deseased. Our treatment of of traditional material is freewillous, but is not irony-driven and thus real. Our theatre is chaotic and spontaneous and because of that is alarming and response-provoking. From where we stand it is clear that world's cultures contain material for endless art-possibilities, and new mind-stretching combinations, raw joy and survival energy. We chose to work with Gypsy, Cabaret and punk traditions. It's what we know and feel. And many more are possible that can make the beloved statement of post-modernism "everything is been done" sound as an intellectual error. The troubadours of neo-authentics are comin as a trans-global art syndicate family that has never been witnessed before. [All sic.]²

This statement, and the presentation of Gogol Bordello as an artistic consortium rather than simply as a band, reveals the origins of Gypsy Punk to be something beyond a simple sequence of events, and shows that it is by no means confined to music. It is presented not as a phenomenon that has come into being organically, as a product of incidents, but as something that has been deliberately set in motion. Throughout the first half of Gogol Bordello's career, there was frequent talk of a Gypsy Punk revolution: this was referenced in Gogol Bordello's lyrics, appeared on their merchandise and was often discussed by Hütz in interviews. Although the statement from the Whitney Biennial does not call for revolution directly, it speaks of 'new sources of authentic energy' and insists on the problematic hegemony of postmodernism. These elements suggest the incitement

² Eugene Hütz: 'Mission', *Gogol Bordello website* <<http://gogolbordello.com/immi-punks/mission/>>

of a new set of values and serve to align the statement closely with the notion of a Gypsy Punk revolution. If Gypsy Punk is a movement that sought to bring about a revolution of some kind, then the statement serves as its manifesto. In this chapter I will set out to establish what Gogol Bordello intended to achieve with their Gypsy Punk revolution, and to determine their political standpoint. In order to do this, I will consider the key concepts that appear in the manifesto, which I take to be the postmodern, the authentic and the trans-global.

In the manifesto, the postmodern represents everything that Gypsy Punk purports to oppose: Gogol Bordello equate it with irony, which is presented as something unambiguously negative. However, there are arguments that Gogol Bordello are themselves postmodern. By considering the work of theorists of the postmodern, such as Jameson, Lyotard and Barth, it will be possible to determine the position of Gypsy Punk in relation to postmodernism. Connected with the postmodern in the manifesto is the notion of the authentic. This is championed by Gogol Bordello, and their manifesto is by no means unique in favouring music that is considered to be authentic. But, as we shall see, concerns of authenticity in music have particular associations with world music, a genre shunned by Hütz and his band. The authenticity of Gogol Bordello can also be brought into question, not only in relation to their music, but also when their manifesto is read with reference to the work of Adorno. Finally, I will examine the trans-global, which is translated from Gogol Bordello's manifesto to their music through their concept of *Multi Kontra Culti*. This concept is not satisfactorily defined by Gogol Bordello, but by examining different forms of globalisation of multiculturalism, I will reveal how it represents their stance in relation to these areas.

OUT OF THE 'POST-MODERN AESTHETIC SWAMP'

At the centre of Gogol Bordello's manifesto is the notion that the postmodern world is diseased (or possibly even deceased) as a result of irony. The postmodern and the ironic seem to be connected in that they are both seen as symptomatic of an artistic decline that Gypsy Punk seeks to challenge. The inhabitants of the 'post-modern aesthetic swamp' are 'jaded' and, according to Gogol Bordello,

postmodernism is entering its obsolescence. But, since the postmodern can represent many different things, we cannot consider what Gogol Bordello mean by their manifesto without first determining what their conception of the postmodern is. The section of the manifesto that hints most strongly at this is the sentence, 'And many more are possible that make the beloved statement of post-modernism "everything is been done" sound as an intellectual error.' Evidently, their understanding of the postmodern is that it is a confluence (an 'aesthetic swamp') of texts and ideas that marks the end of original thoughts and messages.

It is also necessary to determine where in relation to the postmodern Gogol Bordello are aiming to position themselves. How do they intend to react against postmodernism? In interviews, Hütz frequently uses the metaphor of a goldmine when describing his influences or new inspiration; this habit is especially pronounced when he is discussing 'gypsy' music. His lexical choice is particularly telling here: it is suggestive of digging through accumulated layers of culture to reveal artefacts of value that are impacted beneath the surface, rather than building upwards. The indication here is that Gypsy Punk has no drive to go beyond the postmodern; instead there is a desire to draw on cultures that flourished before the onset of what is perceived as postmodernism. Yet in its amalgamation of two very different forms of music and culture, its appropriation of elements from an array of cultures and languages, and its self-conscious awareness of its influences, Gypsy Punk might be thought of as being postmodern itself. As such, the anti-postmodern sentiment in Gogol Bordello's manifesto may seem to be somewhat misdirected.

Postmodernism is often associated with fragmentation. Fredric Jameson has written that one of its features is 'the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents'³, though the fragmentation of culture and history is also important. Jean-François Lyotard described postmodernism as a rejection of grand narratives⁴ – these grand narratives, overarching philosophies that have been used to engage with the world, are, in a sense, broken down into their

³ Fredric Jameson: 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', Fredric Jameson: *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), p.20.

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.37.

component parts and reassembled in all manner of eclectic and hybrid ways. This is perhaps what Gogol Bordello refer to when they equate postmodernism with the suggestion that ‘everything is been done’: everything truly original has already been produced, and we are reduced to fragmenting and drawing from earlier cultural forms. In the case of Gogol Bordello, we can also draw comparisons with the fragmentation of space, since cultural elements from Russia and Eastern Europe strongly inform Gypsy Punk. Although Hütz was born in what is now Ukraine, at the time of his birth in 1972, that country was part of the USSR. Almost as soon as Soviet communism – which can be considered a grand narrative – collapsed, the USSR broke down into its component parts and smaller countries began to appear. The situation was similar in parts of Eastern Europe: Czechoslovakia became the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Yugoslavia disintegrated.⁵ This part of the history of Eastern Europe is not alluded to in Gogol Bordello’s work: Gypsy Punk seems to invoke an earlier (though indistinct) period in time, and this is in keeping with Hütz’s comment that ‘gypsy’ music is a ‘goldmine of authentic energy’⁶.

The suggestion in Gogol Bordello’s manifesto that ‘everything is been done’ recalls John Barth’s ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, in which he praises postmodern writing. In this essay he talks of ‘the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities’⁷. He proclaims his admiration for the postmodern writings of Borges, such as ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, which describes a writer who produces sections of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* – not copies but original writings that take an identical form to parts of Cervantes’ novel.⁸ Barth says of Borges, ‘His artistic victory, if you like, is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work.’⁹ This is an appropriate way of describing postmodernism – it is a reaction to ‘used-upness’. According to Gogol Bordello’s manifesto, Gypsy Punk is also a

⁵ The Balkans, and the connotations of this region, will be considered in greater depth in Chapter Five.

⁶ Ryan Cooper: ‘An Interview with Eugene Hütz of Gogol Bordello: Talking About the Gypsy Punk Revolution’, *About.com* <<http://punkmusic.about.com/od/interviews/a/Eugenehutz.htm>>

⁷ John Barth: ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, John Barth: *The Friday Book* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), p.64.

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges: ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, Jorge Luis Borges: *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp.62-71.

⁹ Barth, p.69.

reaction to 'used-upness', but in this instance it is postmodernism that is regarded as used up. The Gypsy Punk manifesto comes thirty-five years after Barth's essay, but this attack on the postmodern suggests that it is still a major cultural force. Furthermore, Gogol Bordello create their work out of dead ends and, to do so, they draw on things that have been used before – they use elements from traditional music, and are informed by punk. According to some commentators, punk is itself postmodern¹⁰; Gypsy Punk also seems to be a postmodern product in its reclamation of previously used forms.

However, postmodernism is rejected in the manifesto, which indicates that Gypsy Punk is not postmodern because of its lack of irony: 'Our treatment of traditional material is freewillous, but is not irony-driven and thus real [sic.]' While Gogol Bordello compare irony to a disease, for Barth it is something that can validate art in an era of cultural exhaustion:

I declared earlier that if Beethoven's Sixth were composed today, it might be an embarrassment; but clearly it wouldn't be, necessarily, if done with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are. It would have then potentially, for better or worse, the kind of significance of Warhol's Campbell's soup cans, the difference being that in the former case a work of art is being produced instead of a work of non-art, and the ironic comment would therefore be more directly on the genre and history of the art than on the state of the culture.¹¹

Of course, this does not mean that Gypsy Punk, a form produced apparently without irony, has no artistic merit. Moreover, the fact that Gogol Bordello insist that their work is devoid of irony does not necessarily mean that it actually is. Jameson has introduced pastiche as a key feature of postmodernism, and defines it

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson describes punk as postmodern in his essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society'. Jennifer Cypher's 'Ruder Than You: Punk's Postmodern Aesthetic' considers how punk became subsumed into postmodern culture.

¹¹ Barth, p.69.

as follows:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared with which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour: pastiche is to parody what that curious thing, the modern practice of a kind of blank irony, is to what Wayne Booth calls the stable and comic ironies of the eighteenth century.¹²

According to Jameson's definition, the symphony imagined by Barth would be a pastiche. But more significant here is his description of pastiche as 'a kind of blank irony', since much of the music that Gogol Bordello produce can be considered pastiche. This can be seen in their appropriation of 'gypsy' music – and this is not limited only to the use of a particular musical style, since on occasion they include elements taken directly from Romani and East European folk songs. Their song 'Sun is on My Side' borrows its chorus from a Russian Romani song called 'Ke Chourlaki', while 'Suddenly... I Miss Carpaty' shares instrumental passages with the traditional 'Odessa Bulgar'. 'Pala Tute' is a Romani song that was popularised by Hütz when he and Sergey Ryabtsev performed it with Madonna at the Live Earth concert in London in 2005; Gogol Bordello eventually released it as a single in 2010. Their reclamation of forms such as punk and reggae, which might otherwise be thought of as 'used up', shows the wider extent of their imitation. Although there are humorous elements to some of Gogol Bordello's songs, there is no parody in their conjoining of styles; this is made clear in the manifesto. Gypsy Punk is therefore an ironic form, despite the fact that irony as it is understood by Gogol Bordello is something that they seek to reject. Placed in opposition to irony in the manifesto is the idea of the authentic and we now move in to examine this,

¹² Jameson, p.5.

and to consider how far Gogol Bordello's Gypsy Punk can be described as authentic.

'THE TROUBADOURS OF NEO-AUTHENTICS'

In his exploration of authenticity in American culture, Miles Orvell introduces a 'dialectic between imitation and authenticity.'¹³ According to Orvell, the late nineteenth century was a culture of imitation, and the modernist period one preoccupied with authenticity, whilst 'our own time might be called a culture of the factitious. We have a hunger for something like authenticity, but we are easily satisfied by the ersatz.'¹⁴ Gogol Bordello seem not to be satisfied by anything less than the authentic: their manifesto sets out a movement from postmodernism to what is described as 'new sources of authentic energy'. This insistence on the authentic recurs in Gypsy Punk; when Hütz recommends music on Gogol Bordello's website, for example, he comes across as concerned with the 'authenticity' of the work¹⁵. Elsewhere on the website he writes about the importance of 'authentic energy'¹⁶ and 'authentic cultures'¹⁷.

The notion of authenticity is certainly important to studies of popular music. Simon Frith has written that 'The rock aesthetic depends, crucially, on an argument about authenticity. Good music is the authentic expression of something – a person, an idea, a feeling, a shared experience, a *Zeitgeist*. Bad music is inauthentic – it expresses nothing.'¹⁸ The very existence of Gogol Bordello's manifesto indicates that Gypsy Punk is an attempt at expressing something, so following the definition outlined by Frith Gogol Bordello can be regarded as authentic. However, Timothy D. Taylor has argued that in the context of world music, 'No longer [...] does the industry evince a strong interest in "authentic"

¹³ Miles Orvell: *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p.xi.

¹⁴ Orvell, p.xxiii.

¹⁵ Hütz: 'Recommended Music', *Gogol Bordello website* <<http://gogolbordello.com/hutzovina/recommended/index.php>>

¹⁶ Hütz: 'Mission'.

¹⁷ Hütz: 'Intro Word', *Gogol Bordello website* <<http://gogolbordello.com/hutzovina/introword/>>

¹⁸ Simon Frith: 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music', Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (eds.): *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.136.

sounds; the demand for authenticity as sound is now frequently converted to authenticity as a racialized or ethnicized person, usually signified by a CD cover photograph and/or the performer's name.¹⁹ Gogol Bordello reject the idea of world music; Hütz has said that the term 'blocked audiences from being able to hear worldwide rock and roll culture, because anything not in English went into a world music section, like a trash bin that only nerds and geeks bother to go into.'²⁰ However, since Gogol Bordello's manifesto emphasises the use of a range of global cultures, it may be helpful to consider questions of authenticity and world music when considering the importance of authenticity to Gypsy Punk.

The world music genre was created in the late 1980s by record labels who sought a way of classifying music from non-Western or non-English speaking cultures that was now being marketed in the West.²¹ If authenticity is important in popular music criticism, then it is all the more significant in discussions of world music. Rupa Huq has written that 'World music is frequently seen as the archetypally 'authentic' musical style of our times'²², and she goes on to state that it 'contains the promise of a return to undoctored 'real world' sounds in an inauthentic world where people are constantly bombarded by flickering electronic imagery generated by the mass media.'²³ Frith has also noted that the idea of the authentic is used in the marketing of world music.²⁴ However, the exact parameters of the genre vary considerably: sometimes it is restricted to traditional forms of music, but it is often used to describe a fusion of Western and non-Western styles.

Huq attempts to categorise the way that her examples, bhangra and raï, relate to world music by using the seven world music categories established by musicologist Pedro van der Lee, which he ranks according to their perceived authenticity, and which I quote here in an abridged form:

¹⁹ Timothy D. Taylor: 'Bad World Music', Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (eds.): *Bad Music: The Music We Love To Hate* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.86.

²⁰ Xení Jardin: 'Gogol Bordello: "Immigraniada (We Comin' Rougher)"', *Boing Boing*, 16 September 2010 <<http://boingboing.net/2010/09/16/gogol-bordello-immig.html>>

²¹ Simon Frith: 'The Discourse of World Music', Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds.): *Western Music and Its Others* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p.305.

²² Rupa Huq: *Beyond Subculture* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.64.

²³ Huq, p.66.

²⁴ Frith: 'The Discourse of World Music', p.307.

1. Functional and ritual styles from rural areas; intended for participation in the original context, seldom for performance
2. Art music from older high cultures and popular music influenced by it
3. Styles, dances, songs, ceremonies, etc. designed one way or another for presentation in contexts other than the original
4. Earlier forms of rural and urban music [...] often exhibiting European popular or art influences
5. Third World assimilations of more recent Western traits
6. Western assimilation of non-Western traits
7. Certain works that make generous use of decontextualised musical traits, sometimes assembled in a rather eclectic way, and almost exclusively Western products²⁵

However, Huq finds that the evolution of that bhangra and raï have gone through means that they cannot easily be located on this scale. She hypothesises that ‘The examples I have outlined point to a rejection of the insistence on authenticity that has long been interwoven in world music’²⁶ and then concludes that ‘Perhaps the only thing that can unreservedly be equated with authenticity is the impossibility of achieving it.’²⁷ Gogol Bordello thus occupy a paradoxical position: they reject the idea of world music, but cling to the notion of authenticity. As such, it may be valuable to try and locate Gypsy Punk on van der Lee’s scale of authenticity; this will enable us to determine whether Gogol Bordello’s work can legitimately be regarded as world music, and to assess how authentic they are. If we attempt to locate Gogol Bordello somewhere on this scale then they could be any of (5), (6) or (7). Since the band is comprised largely of migrants from outside the West, their work may be described as an assimilation of the Western style of punk (5). However, since they came together in the West, and since this is where they primarily work, they can also be seen as a Western band that incorporates non-Western forms of music (6). The wide range of styles that they use means that

²⁵ Pedro van der Lee: ‘Sitaras and Bossas: World Music Influences’, *Popular Music*, Vol. 17, No. 1, p.45.

²⁶ Huq, p.85.

²⁷ Huq, p.86.

they may be thought of as (7), but their engagement with the wider contexts of their influences means that this is less likely.

This might indicate that Gypsy Punk could be marketed as world music, but that it would be seen as a form of world music that rejected insistence on authenticity. In fact, Gypsy Punk as conceived of by Gogol Bordello is the exact opposite of this: it is thus authentic because it is not world music. The genres that are combined in Gypsy Punk may also contribute to a sense of authenticity. Qualities such as wildness and a desire for freedom, which are associated with the figure of the 'gypsy' mean that 'gypsy' music is regarded as a particularly authentic form. Similarly, the rawness and DIY ethos of punk mean that it is thought of as more authentic than other styles derived from rock. Gypsy Punk may therefore seem especially authentic because it is a hybrid of these two authentic styles. However, Gogol Bordello's self-ascribed authenticity does not need to be supported by evidence that a 'real' or 'genuine' music is being produced: it is a statement that distances Gypsy Punk from the world music experiments of Western pop musicians, and which signifies an attachment to the cultures that inform Gogol Bordello's music.

However, Gogol Bordello not only strive to be authentic in comparison to world music, but also seek to be authentic in their own right. Examining what they regard as bad, or inauthentic, music may help us to understand exactly what this kind of authenticity might entail. Discussing inauthentic music, Hütz has written that, 'nobody in their fucking right mind, of course, would start passing legends about, for example, The Strokes... or their twin sister Britney Spears.'²⁸ It is interesting that he singles out for condemnation two artists who are quite different. Britney Spears is a good example of a manufactured pop artist who has had great success but who has rarely been regarded as someone who produces particularly remarkable or original music. Additionally, she is responsible for writing little of her material, and she is not known for playing any instrument; therefore, her limited input into the writing and playing of songs may mean that she is thought to be less authentic. The Strokes are perhaps less likely to be accused of producing inauthentic music: they are not a manufactured band, they

²⁸ Hütz: 'Intro Word'.

write their own material and they play instruments. While Hütz does not specify what his particular gripe with them is, it is likely that he considers their work rather derivative; this has been a common criticism, although critical reception of their music has generally been favourable. The Strokes wear influences such as Television and the New York Dolls very much on their sleeves, and may be regarded as so similar to these artists that they become redundant themselves. The fact that Gogol Bordello's sound is almost unique may therefore be central to their self-perceived authenticity.

Frith is also helpful in determining Gogol Bordello's stance on the authentic, when he writes that authenticity is 'The most misleading term in cultural theory'. He adds, 'What we should be examining is not how true a piece of music is to something else, but how it sets up the idea of 'truth' in the first place – successful pop music is music which defines its own aesthetic standard.'²⁹ Whereas The Strokes work within an aesthetic that has already been defined, Gogol Bordello create a new one for themselves. Although they work with established genres, their manifesto establishes a new set of parameters and reinforces their authenticity. As such, the content of the manifesto may be less important than the fact that Gogol Bordello have produced a manifesto for Gypsy Punk. However, the fact that they stress the importance of authenticity within that manifesto leaves them open to criticism. In his 1964 book *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Theodor Adorno presented a critique of the language that he believed was used to convey authenticity. Introducing this idea, he wrote:

In Germany a jargon of authenticity is spoken – even more so, written. Its language is a trademark of societalized chosenness, noble and homey at one – sub-language as superior language. [...] While the jargon overflows with the pretense of deep human emotion, it is just as standardized as the world that it officially negates; the reason for this lies partly in the fact that it posits its message automatically, through its mere nature. Thus the jargon

²⁹ Frith: 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music', p.137.

bars the message from the experience which is to ensoul it.³⁰

Adorno's criticisms are aimed primarily at existentialism, but as a critique of language, *The Jargon of Authenticity* might find a new target in Gypsy Punk. Adorno describes this jargon as 'the breakdown of language into words in themselves'³¹, and states that 'the jargon has at its disposal a modest number of words which are received as promptly as signals'.³² Some of the words he gives as examples are 'existential', 'in the decision', 'commission', and 'appeal'. In Gogol Bordello's manifesto we find a comparable vocabulary, with words like 'post-modern', 'irony' and, of course, 'authentic' performing a similar function: these terms signify the Gypsy Punk revolution propounded by Gogol Bordello, but they do not fully explain what it is. Writing about authenticity in folklore, Regina Bendix has said that 'Declaring a particular form of expressive culture as dead or dying limits the number of authentic items, but it promotes the search for not yet discovered and hence authentic folklore.'³³ Describing postmodern culture as 'irony-deseased', Gogol Bordello make it clear that they consider this culture to be either dead or sick; perhaps it could be argued that this statement may be intended to provoke the discovery or production of authentic cultures. But Bendix goes on to argue that:

cultures do not die, at best they change, along with those who live in them and thus constitute them. What must change for cultural fields is how workers in those fields conceptualize the object. Removing authenticity and its allied vocabulary is one useful step toward conceptualizing the study of culture in the age of transculturation.³⁴

In Gypsy Punk, however, the vocabulary of authenticity goes hand in hand with the

³⁰ Theodor Adorno: *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.5.

³¹ Adorno, p.7.

³² Adorno, p.6.

³³ Regina Bendix: *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p.9.

³⁴ Bendix, p.9.

idea of the multicultural, as we can see in their artist's statement. This manifesto was released a few months before their second album, *Multi Kontra Culti Vs. Irony*. With this rather ungainly title, they announced their intent to take on irony through their own brand of multiculturalism. As we can surmise from the name, the concept of *Multi Kontra Culti* combines the counterculture that is alluded to in the manifesto with the favouring of the multicultural that is so prominent in Gogol Bordello's work. Writing on authenticity and music, Frith has stated that 'To understand punk [...] we need to trace within it the interplay of authenticity and artifice; to understand country we need to follow the interplay of authenticity and sentiment.'³⁵ We might add to this that in order to understand Gypsy Punk we need to examine the interplay of authenticity and the multicultural. Having considered the authentic in relation to Gogol Bordello, we now turn to their stance on multiculturalism.

MULTI KONTRA CULTI

In addition to their engagement with issues facing the Roma and immigrants, Gogol Bordello frequently comment on globalisation and multiculturalism. As such, they might seem to be a particularly political band, but Hütz has rejected this suggestion, declaring in one interview that he had lost interest in the conversation when the word 'politics' was introduced.³⁶ However, this does not take away from the fact that Gogol Bordello's work often includes clear political messages. In the video for their 2010 single 'Immigraniada', for example, they comment on immigration policy in the USA, stating that 'No Human Being Is Illegal', and in their song 'Break the Spell', they speak out in support of Roma Rights. But since Hütz and his colleagues are reluctant to outwardly engage with politics, one of the tasks of academics assessing Gypsy Punk is to determine what its politics are. In an attempt to do this, I will consider the relationships that Gypsy Punk has established with globalisation and multiculturalism. For each of these concepts I

³⁵ Frith: 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music', p.147.

³⁶ Nadia Kuftinoff: 'An Interview With Eugene Hütz and Santeri Ahlgren', *sixteentwelve88*, 27 January 2011 <<http://sixteentwelve88.livejournal.com/47666.html#cutid1>>

will consider examples from Gogol Bordello's work in which these issues are raised, and from there establish what is intended by the concept of *Multi Kontra Culti*.

Fredric Jameson has described postmodern culture as, 'global, yet American', adding that it is 'the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world'.³⁷ In the context of Gypsy Punk, this is a particularly interesting point. As a band that came together in New York, Gogol Bordello is also 'global, yet American' and, as we have seen, they are arguably postmodern, despite their professed opposition towards postmodernity. But if we are able to leave aside the potential contradiction here, and consider more of the messages propounded by Gogol Bordello, we may see that it is the state of the 'global' in the postmodern era that concerns Gypsy Punk. This refers to the increasing navigability and accessibility of the world, regarded as an important characteristic of the postmodern age. In 1990, David Harvey discussed the idea of 'time-space compression'³⁸, whereby the time taken to traverse space is diminished; in the intervening twenty years this has become even more pronounced. It is now possible to travel globally with relative ease and speed, and new technologies mean that the movement of information is continually becoming quicker. One consequence of this is the sense that places are becoming increasingly homogenised. The streets of large cities are now lined with the same shops, and billboards advertise the same products, in almost every country in the world. Meanwhile, the more unique aspects of these places are demolished by global brands, and a sense of diversity from place to place becomes harder to find.

For Gogol Bordello, the distinct identity of specific places is highly important: the multinational composition of the band is one of their defining features, and if there is little difference between different places then much of the group's hybrid identity is lost. They confront the risk of homogeneity in their song 'Through the Roof 'n' Underground', in which they describe how, 'The local cultures are dying and dying / The programmed robots are buying and buying.' In

³⁷ Fredric Jameson: *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p.5.

³⁸ David Harvey: *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), p.240

order to escape this situation, they claim that the alternative is to go 'through the roof' or 'underground': this reveals their attitude that globalisation is something to be avoided. Criticisms of globalisation often take the form of economic critiques – large corporations that use labour and resources in the developing world are accused of exploitation, and economic inequality on a global level is said to be rising – but Gypsy Punk addresses its impact on culture.

Of course, the cultural effects of globalisation are derived from its economics. In the same way that global fast food chains sell near-identical burgers around the world, record labels market the same music internationally. As an international band, Gogol Bordello are in fact bound up inextricably with this system, yet they dissociate themselves from the homogeneity that it entails: Hütz has said in one interview that it is 'a big irony to hear my music described as celebrating globalization'³⁹. Gypsy Punk thus rejects globalisation whilst being caught up in the very system that it allegedly opposes. As such, it is easy to regard Gogol Bordello as insincere. In a review of their 2002 album *Multi Kontra Culti Vs. Irony* on the music website *Pitchfork*, Michael Idov wrote that the record 'feigns rage against fashionable bogeymen of globalization'⁴⁰. However, the stance against globalisation that Gogol Bordello claim to take seems to be so pronounced and so sustained that, almost a decade further into their career, it is difficult to read it as feigned.

In order to negotiate this debate, it is necessary to introduce the idea that there are two different types of globalisation – the homogenising and the hybrid. As we have seen, one of the consequences of globalisation is its homogenising effect on cultures; in Jameson's words, the world has become 'global, yet American'. Meanwhile, Anthony Giddens has noted that globalisation 'bears the strong imprint of American political and economic power'⁴¹. The template for the homogenised world that globalisation produces is essentially Western, and there is a belief that the world is becoming increasingly westernised and that American

³⁹ Andrew Dansby: 'The father of Gypsy punk', *Chron Entertainment*, 11 March 2008
<<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ent/5610601.html>>

⁴⁰ Michael Idov: Album Review: Gogol Bordello: *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, *Pitchfork*, 1 April 2003
<<http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/3494-multi-kontra-culti-vs-irony>>

⁴¹ Anthony Giddens: *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping Our Lives* (London: Profile, 1999), p.4.

culture is acquiring dominance worldwide. Indeed, Hütz has spoken of what he describes as a 'cultural and economic problem' of Western society becoming isolated by 'favoring white products and force-feeding it'.⁴² However, it is arguable that this kind of homogenisation is in fact limited to the economic aspects of globalisation, and that cultural globalisation is less pronounced, as John Storey argues:

Now it is one thing to point to the successful way in which capitalism as a global system has organized the world in terms of the commodity and the market, but it is quite another to then claim that the result is a homogenized world culture. It is only possible to think this if you already think that commodities equal culture in an obvious and straightforward way.⁴³

But even if homogenisation is something that impacts on commodities rather than cultures, it is certainly the case that culture has changed as a result of globalisation. In this case, however, we see hybridity rather than homogeneity. The reasons for this lie in the increasing value that is placed on localised cultures, as observed by Giddens:

Globalisation is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world. If one asks, for example, why the Scots want more independence in the UK, or why there is a strong separatist movement in Quebec, the answer is not to be found only in their cultural history. Local nationalisms spring up as a response to globalising tendencies, as the hold of older nation-states weakens.⁴⁴

This is also the case with culture: when the same Western pop songs are replayed

⁴² Cooper: 'An Interview with Eugene Hütz of Gogol Bordello: Talking About the Gypsy Punk Revolution'

⁴³ John Storey: *Inventing Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), p.110.

⁴⁴ Giddens, p.13.

around the globe, traditional music is reinvoked as a reaction to this. In many cases, this is a reaction that occurs on a local level, but the growth of 'time-space compression' means that these localised forms of culture are accessible worldwide. The result is hybridity: traditional forms of music are mixed together, and sometimes combined with popular Western forms. We can see examples of this in genres like Afropop, Bhangra and, of course, in Gypsy Punk. Access to global forms of music has come about through two different channels. Technological advances mean that recordings are more readily available on the internet, and any kind of music can be listened to anywhere in the world.

But more significantly, immigrants have taken their music with them to the countries in which they have settled; over time this music has gradually been influenced by the music of the host country, and vice versa. The resulting hybridity can be found throughout Gogol Bordello's music: both musically, in the way that traditional East European music is combined with punk, and lyrically, in the use of multiple languages that is a characteristic of their work. However, the fact that Gogol Bordello are clearly in favour of multiple cultures coming together, but at the same time claim an opposition towards globalisation, demands unpacking, since the terms 'globalisation' and 'multiculturalism' are so often associated with one another. It should also be noted that elements of music have been moved around the globe in more controversial ways. David Hesmondhalgh considers the practice of sampling in fusion music, specifically the example of Transglobal Underground's 1991 single 'Temple Head', central to which is the use of samples from a Tahitian gospel choir. However, the originators of this music were not credited or paid for its use.⁴⁵ The ethics of sampling remains the subject of ongoing debate, but it is certainly the case that it is more controversial when Western artists make use of a non-Western musicians' work in this way. The idea of multiculturalism can be used as a defence of such practices.

It is hardly surprising that Gogol Bordello should champion multiculturalism, since they are very much a product of a multicultural society. Their particular style and ethos is a consequence of the band being made up of

⁴⁵ David Hesmondhalgh: 'International Times: Fusions, Exoticism and Antiracism in Electronic Dance Music', Georgia Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds.): *Western Music and its Others* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p.283.

immigrants from several different countries who came together in one place – New York – which is as significant to Gogol Bordello’s sound as the origins of the band’s personnel, and which is often used in their work to symbolise the multicultural environment. Gogol Bordello first began to engage with their multicultural element in a self-conscious way in 2002 – the same year that they issued their manifesto through the Whitney Museum – with the release of their second album *Multi Kontra Cults vs. Irony*. The concept behind this album is that multiculturalism can be used as a weapon against irony, which in the Gypsy Punk lexicon stands for the idea that ‘everything is been done’. While the album channels styles of global music that include East European folk and the guitar music of Russian Roma, it is grounded in New York; there are references to various locations in this city throughout the album. The global sounds are not there to transport listeners away from the USA; they are intended as signifiers of its multicultural population.

The New York locations that are referenced in the album include East Houston Street in the Lower East Side and Brighton Beach – both areas that have strong associations with immigrant communities. The Lower East Side served as a settling point for new arrivals in America throughout the twentieth century, first Russians and East European Jews, and later Asian and Puerto Rican migrants. Brighton Beach has a large Russian community, and since Gogol Bordello includes two Russian musicians as well as the Ukrainian Hütz, it is an important part of the New York that they describe. The use of these locations is supplemented by the inclusion of multiple languages – not only Russian, but also Romani and Spanish. The array of languages that can be heard on the album create the impression of a landscape populated by people with a broad range of backgrounds, and this is exactly what Gogol Bordello represent. Along with the appropriation of styles of music from Eastern Europe, Russia and Latin America, and references to areas of New York that have large immigrant populations, this ensures that the album has a thoroughly multicultural feel.

While *Multi Kontra Cults Vs. Irony* bears the name of the Gogol Bordello’s brand of multiculturalism, it is perhaps best exemplified in the song ‘Think Locally Fuck Globally’, which features on the 2005 album *Gypsy Punks*. The essential message of this song is contained entirely within its title, but this can be

interpreted in several ways. Firstly, and most obviously, it is a criticism of globalisation, and a call for the promotion of more localised cultures and products. It is important to note that the local cultures referred to here need not be indigenous ones, since Gogol Bordello are visibly supportive of migration and the free movement of people between countries: since 2010 they have refused to perform in Arizona in response to that state's Senate Bill 1070, which brought into place more stringent measures against illegal immigration. Therefore, this song is not an exhortation to think primarily of one's local culture, but to consider the range of localised cultures that exist globally, rather than reducing them to one globalised culture. On another level, there is also the sexual element in the song's title: this may be read as encouraging engagement with people of other cultures and from other cultures. However, the fact that the fastest growing ethnic group in many countries, including the USA and the UK, is now mixed race may be another example of the homogenising effect that Gogol Bordello speak out against elsewhere.

But Gogol Bordello seem far less concerned with ethnic difference than with cultural diversity, and while the multiracial makeup of the band certainly suggests a broad mixture of cultures, they also achieve this through other means. Their use of multiple languages is particularly important here. David Steigerwald has observed that 'One of the most important indications that the breakdown of physical isolation threatens cultural integrity is the steady erosion of linguistic diversity.'⁴⁶ He goes on to note that 'Ninety-five percent of the world's 6000 languages are spoken by only five percent of its population', and describes a 'concentration of linguistic power' in widely-spoken languages such as English, Spanish, Mandarin and Hindi.⁴⁷ Gogol Bordello's lyrics are primarily in English – it is unlikely that they would have achieved any degree of popular success in the USA had they sung mainly in other languages – but many other languages can be heard in their work. Of these, Russian and Ukrainian appear most frequently, but significant sections of many songs are sung in Romani. Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Romanian and Amharic can also be found in their lyrics. Although English

⁴⁶ David Steigerwald: *Culture's Vanities: The Paradox of Cultural Diversity in a Globalized World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p.123.

⁴⁷ Steigerwald, p.123.

remains dominant, this linguistic diversity serves as a reminder that other languages can be used in music to great effect. In many cases, two or more languages can be heard in the same song; this reflects the way that speakers of different languages live side by side in multicultural societies. In their use of multiple languages, Gogol Bordello therefore represents the multilingual society in which we live more accurately than most other music.

However, their template for multiculturalism is not solely an American one. Hütz has described how the Carpathian region in Western Ukraine, where he lived as a teenager, was diverse in a way that foreshadowed the society he would later encounter in New York. In one interview it is described as a 'melting pot of Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian and Romanian cultures'⁴⁸. This East European multiculturalism may go some way to explaining the way in which Eastern Europe is represented in Gogol Bordello's work. Elements of music and culture appear to be taken from several different East European countries: themes from Romanian folk songs are mixed with vocal stylings that originate with Hungarian Roma and Balkan brass sounds. In addition, Hütz has created a fictional country called Hützovina, which first appeared in their debut album *Voi-La Intruder* in 1999, and which reappears in *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, specifically in the song 'Occurrence on the Border'. Hützovina seems at first like a generic Balkan state. But in being generic, it has no dominant culture that results in the suppression of other cultures; combined with the fact that Hützovina is sung about by musicians whose nationalities range from Israeli to Ecuadorian, this means that it is portrayed as a multicultural place.

When Hützovina is injected into New York, as is the case in *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, its multiculturalism is compounded. A more pronounced instance of this can be seen in the song 'Dogs Were Barking', which appears on the album *Gypsy Punks*. As with *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, this is an album that is grounded in multicultural New York, and 'Dogs Were Barking' is one of several tracks that directly reference a location in the city. The song begins with a description of the chaotic hedonism of a stereotypical Romani wedding celebration, which includes monkeys and dancing bears; a multicultural East European atmosphere is created

⁴⁸ Susan Kessler: 'Gypsy Punk Rocker Eugene Hütz', *Passport Magazine*, July 2006
<<http://www.passportmagazine.ru/article/477/>>

through the prominence of violin and accordion, and the use of Russian lyrics. This atmosphere is then displaced to New York's Lower East Side when Hütz sings of meeting someone at the intersection of Broadway and Canal Street, in a 'disco radical trans-global'. The idea of the trans-global is also important to Gogol Bordello: the 'gypsy' figures that are so integral to their work are constantly travelling on a global scale, but in Gypsy Punk 'trans-global' can also refer to a single place in which multiple cultures are manifest. In the case of 'Dogs Were Barking', the 'disco radical trans-global' (which refers to a Bulgarian bar called the Mehanata where Hütz used to DJ regularly) indicates a melange of cultures in one location.

Gogol Bordello's trans-global music might seem to evoke the distances covered and countries visited by migrants, as well as by the Romani people, but in fact they frequently tie their trans-globalism to specific places. These sites of multiculturalism may be very localised, as with the Mehanata, or they may be whole cities like New York or Rio de Janeiro, which is channelled throughout the 2010 album *Transcontinental Hustle*. As we have seen in the example of Hützovina, they may even be fictional. In their use of the Gypsy Punk genre Gogol Bordello seek to evoke an environment in which immigrant and minority communities are prominent. This is very much the case with their use of 'gypsy' figures. In the song 'Sally' a girl from Nebraska starts what is described as a 'revolution' after meeting a group of 'gypsies', while in 'Underdog World Strike', the 'gypsy part of town' is presented as a conduit to cultural exchange, where punk, hip-hop and reggae combine with 'gypsy' music.

While this sounds overwhelmingly positive and suggests a successful multicultural society, multiculturalism is not without its critics. In his critique of multicultural America, *The Disuniting of America*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. writes: "Multiculturalism" arises as a reaction against Anglo- or Eurocentrism; but at what point does it pass over into an ethnocentrism of its own? The very word, instead of referring as it should to all cultures, has come to refer only to non-Western, nonwhite cultures.⁴⁹ Schlesinger's argument is not without relevance, and is clearly applicable in music, as Hesmondhalgh's comments on Transglobal

⁴⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.: *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), p.74.

Underground and their use of sampling indicate. In the Gypsy Punk version of multiculturalism, however, we can see that it is possible to have a multicultural society in which this is not the case. Gogol Bordello have successfully positioned themselves just outside of 'non-Western, nonwhite' culture, but have not abandoned it completely. By rejecting the term world music, and citing as influences the primarily white Western genre of punk alongside the more exotic traditions of 'gypsy' and cabaret, they ensure that they are thoroughly multicultural without being too detached from the traditionally more dominant cultures of the environment in which the band was formed.

Their brand of multiculturalism, *Multi Kontra Culti*, is therefore both pervasive and inclusive. This designation calls to mind not only multiculturalism but also counterculture, with the intimation being that the multicultural environment desired by Gypsy Punk can be achieved through countercultural means. Hütz has indicated that there is a mainstream of multiculturalism – similar to the kind described by Schlesinger – which Gogol Bordello strives to avoid. He has rejected the idea that their music might be classified as world music, and has spoken critically of much of the material that is packaged as such: 'Even if you are a curious soul and ventured out to get something different, you very well end up with Buddha Bar or Putamya [sic] record products which promises you something exotic but basically are traps for yuppies who would like to fancy themselves cultured.'⁵⁰ Such products are presented as being inauthentic in comparison with the Gypsy Punk produced by Gogol Bordello.

As we have seen, the album *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony* is grounded in New York, but includes elements that seem to go beyond the perimeters of that multicultural city – such as the use of the fictional Balkan state of Hützovina as the setting for 'Occurrence on the Border', the Romani lyrics of 'Baro Foro' and 'Hats Off to Kolpakoff', which references Russian Roma guitarist Sasha Kolpakov. The album is characterised by a combination of global and American cultures, and the use of multiple languages and diverse musical styles creates an atmosphere that is both global and American. Writing about the specific associations that are created by music, Frith has written, 'Accordions played a certain way mean France,

⁵⁰ Hütz: 'Intro Word'.

bamboo flutes China, just as steel guitars mean country, drum machines the urban dance.⁵¹ In Gypsy Punk, many such associations mount up to produce a new form of music that is recognisable as a representation of an era in which globalisation and multiculturalism are inescapable.

Although globalisation and multiculturalism are clearly different, they are unavoidably connected in that both are the products of a postmodern era in which the distance between disparate places is diminished. This connection is what Gogol Bordello seek to negotiate with *Multi Kontra Culti*. What they oppose is the homogenised state that has burgeoned as a result of globalisation, and the cultural production that occurs within this state. This kind of culture may appear to have a distinct cultural value, but Gogol Bordello argue that it is in fact motivated by the desires and demands of a globalised society. As we have seen, Gypsy Punk is intended as an authentic response to this, and Gogol Bordello purport not to subscribe to the prevailing desires of globalisation. Writing on globalisation and its effects, David Steigerwald has pointed out that, 'Instead of the cozy global village, it is closer to the truth to say that we are falling into lives of ill-defined deracination. We are all becoming rootless.'⁵² It is this sense of being rootless that Gogol Bordello seek to overcome: *Multi Kontra Culti* is an alternative set of values for the production of culture and music in a multicultural age.

⁵¹ Frith: 'Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music', p.148.

⁵² Steigerwald, p.2.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Balkanism and border crossings: Western and Gypsy Punk constructions of the Balkans and Balkan music

ALTERMODERN ACCORDIONS

With their concepts of the neo-authentic and *Multi Kontra Culti*, a manifesto that attempts a critique of postmodernism, and their calls for revolution, Gogol Bordello are evidently interested in the idea of a new cultural era being ushered in. They are certainly not the only artists to have such an interest. Indeed, having been deemed to have the artistic credentials necessary to partake in the Whitney's biennial, Gogol Bordello might have been incorporated successfully into Tate Britain's 2009 triennial, *Altermodern*. Its curator, Nicolas Bourriaud, has coined this term to describe the cultural era that follows on from modernism, and latterly postmodernism. Significantly, he characterises this era as going beyond not only the postmodern, but also the multicultural:

Postmodernism, thanks to the post-colonial criticism of Western pretensions to determine the world's direction and the speed of its development, has allowed the historical counters to be reset to zero; today, temporalities intersect and weave a complex network stripped of a centre. Numerous contemporary art practices indicate, however, that we are on the verge of a leap, out of the postmodern period and the (essentialist) multicultural model from which it is indivisible, a leap that would give rise to a synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism.

Let us then call this synthesis “altermodernism”.¹

The altermodern is a successfully formulated concept that seems pertinent in an age where the economic rise upon which postmodernism thrived is in descent, but in which the globalisation that postmodernism stimulated continues to grow; and Gypsy Punk can be taken to be an art practice that demonstrates Bourriaud’s leap beyond postmodernism. Although the application of the altermodern concept was somewhat hit and miss in the exhibition, one work that is worth considering here, due to its concern with music and nomadism, is Ruth Ewan’s piece ‘Squeezebox Jukebox’, a giant accordion that plays protest songs, ranging from nineteenth century examples through to music by more contemporary artists such as Crass and Manu Chao. The fact that Ewan has chosen an accordion is of interest, since this instrument can be taken as a symbol for many forms of traditional and folk music, including polka and ‘gypsy’ music: indeed she describes it as a ‘cultural bastard’². However, she claims that ‘Within Western popular culture it is an unfashionable and outdated instrument,’ adding that ‘there is a fake authenticity to this nomadic instrument.’³ Indeed, the accordion is often associated with traditional styles of music that are often thought to have remained unchanged for centuries; however, the instrument has a shorter history than many realize, having been invented in Germany in the early nineteenth century.

The Times’ art critic Rachel Campbell-Johnston was disparaging of Ewan’s piece: ‘It will show us how difficult and cumbersome the processes of social change can be. But I don’t think we need a giant squeezebox to show us that.’⁴ But the accordion signifies more than just unwieldiness – in an exhibition in which the global is a key theme, the fact that it is imagined as an ethnic instrument is surely more important. The statement that the accordion is unfashionable seems tenuous: it is not only Gypsy Punk bands who have used it to acclaim and success in recent years, but also rock musicians such as The Decemberists and Arcade Fire.

¹ Nicolas Bourriaud (ed.): *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), p.12.

² Ruth Ewan: ‘Squeezebox Jukebox’, Bourriaud (ed.): *Altermodern*, p.103.

³ Ewan: ‘Squeezebox Jukebox’, p.103.

⁴ Rachel Campbell-Johnson: ‘Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009 at Tate Britain’, *The Times*, 3 February 2009

<http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article5643613.ece>

Although these bands are admittedly a minority in their choice of instrumentation, there is a definite romance to the accordion, which may be derived in part from the degree of skill required in its construction and the perceived difficulty of playing it successfully. Hütz has remarked on this, describing his own attempts to play the instrument:

Learning how to play accordion was simply impossible – have you ever tried that thing? It's insane; it's fucking nuts, man. It's like, to play accordion you must have your brain wired differently. I worship people who can play accordion. I tried it for two years and ended up with minor scoliosis and anxiety problems.⁵

In her presentation of an outsized accordion, it is as though Ewan is attempting to heighten this romance. The fact that it plays protest music also contributes to what she describes as its 'fake authenticity'. However, it is true that when the name of the accordion is invoked composers of rebel music are not the most immediate associations; nor are artists like Arcade Fire. More commonly, the instrument is seen as synonymous with traditional European music, often from the Balkan region. It is from such associations that much of its romance derives. This association between the accordion and the Balkans is just one component of a Balkan identity that has been constructed in the West. Although the accordion is used in many different kinds of European folk music, from France to Finland to Italy, the fact that folk music is regarded by many as a style of music that has remained unchanged and undeveloped means that it becomes associated with the Balkans – a region which has had the same qualities assigned to it, as we shall see. Indeed, it is the lacuna between the Balkans and way that the region is perceived from outside that will be the focus of this chapter.

In the previous chapter we briefly considered the invented country of Hützovina that Gogol Bordello use as part of their multicultural strategy. Although Hützovina is a fictional location, it is apparent from the way it is portrayed that it is intended as a Balkan state. In this chapter I will consider the ways in which the

⁵ 'The Story of the Guitar. Eugene Hutz –guitar vs accordian' [sic], *BBC Imagine*
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/musictv/guitars/video/eugenehutz/>>

Balkans are frequently depicted in popular culture, and examine what representations of the region, specifically those from the West, reveal about the way that the Balkans are regarded. Hützovina will be addressed as a fictional representation of the Balkans that is both of the West and of the Balkans themselves. I will begin by considering what constitutes Balkan music, discussing some contemporary bands which, like Gogol Bordello, are considered Balkan despite having no links with the region, and also musicians from the Balkans. After giving an overview of Hützovina, I will then introduce Maria Todorova's concept of balkanism, which entails the parallel discourses of romanticism and denigration with which representations of the Balkans have historically been constructed in the West. From here, I will identify the specific characteristics that the Balkans are perceived as having, and will review the appearance of such characteristics in fictional representations of the Balkans, before analysing their function in the case of Hützovina. In doing so, I will demonstrate that Hützovina functions as a representation of the Balkans, but that it also moves away from the stereotypes associated with the region.

BALKAN MUSIC

Despite the global level of diversity in Gogol Bordello, which is made up of musicians from five continents, their music is often said to be 'Balkan'. This might seem incongruous, given that none of the band's members are actually from the Balkan region, but Gogol Bordello are not the only victim of this apparent misrepresentation: the term is applied to many other bands and artists, of whom some are also considered Gypsy Punk, while others are neglected by the genre. DeVotchKa, for example, play a form of indie rock with occasional inflections described as 'gypsy', which veers in mood from melancholic to rousing. In common with Gogol Bordello, they became better known after becoming involved in film, featuring heavily on the soundtrack to 2006's *Little Miss Sunshine*. They also have in common a cabaret element to their live performances, including a sousaphone bedecked with fairy lights. Their name, taken from the nadsat cant of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, is suggestive of Russia, while their

instrumentation, which includes bouzouki, violin and accordion, alludes towards both Russia and Eastern Europe. As a result, these two locations become aligned in DeVotchKa's work, and the perception that they are similar may be perpetuated by those who consume the music.

Another band not unlike DeVotchKa is Beirut, spearheaded by American musician Zach Condon. Condon, who has been criticised for adopting styles of music in an almost colonial manner, has admitted that he chose the name Beirut as a suggestive, orientalist, device and that when he adopted the name he had no knowledge of Lebanese music or culture.⁶ He also combines geographical references prolifically. The title of his first album, *Gulag Orkestar*, is suggestive of Soviet Russia and Balkan brass bands, and many of the record's song titles form a collage of European place names: 'Prenzlauerberg', 'Postcards from Italy', 'Rhineland', 'Bratislava' and the fictitious 'Mount Wroclai'. This provoked mixed reactions: one reviewer said that, 'Condon is Balkanizing indie rock, hitching the usual sad-sack sentiments to Eastern European soundscapes: lurching accordions, blaring brass-band fanfares, and other romantic, dolorous sounds. It's an audacious bit of cultural banditry, sometimes in questionable taste (*Gulag Orkestar*? C'mon, now) but the music works wonderfully.'⁷ Another review was less complimentary about the musical style, describing it as sounding like, 'Eugene Hütz, hooked on downers, following a massive stroke'.⁸ Condon's appropriation and use of Eastern European sounds certainly differs from Gogol Bordello's: he says of Gypsy Punk, 'I never really saw that [punk] attitude in Gypsy music [...]. I always saw something a little deeper and less adolescent.'⁹ However, Gogol Bordello, Beirut and DeVotchKa do have in common some of their influences, and the ways in which they employ them. Carol Silverman succinctly addresses the diversity in bands that are often grouped together when she writes that 'There is

⁶ Dorian Lynskey: 'There is no such thing as Gypsy music', *The Guardian*, 24 November 2006, Features, p.5.

⁷ Jody Rosen: 'Balkanization!', *Slate magazine*, 1 September 2006
<<http://www.slate.com/id/2148561/>>

⁸ Matthew Ozga: 'Beirut: Gulag Orkestar', *Prefix Magazine*, 11 July 2006
<<http://www.prefixmag.com/reviews/beirut/gulag-orkestar/15269/>>

⁹ Li Robbins: "'Gypsy' as Music and as Marketing Term", *The Globe and Mail* (Canada) 2 October 2007, p.R4.

no unified musical style in the Gypsy Punk movement'¹⁰; this is arguably also applicable to 'gypsy' music more broadly.

Aside from influence, the major commonality between all three is their fanbase. DeVotchKa draw not only on 'gypsy' music, but also on other styles such as mariachi, and Beirut's second album, *The Flying Club Cup*, was more strongly influenced by French chanson than by East European music. But they have both continued to share fans with Gogol Bordello (DeVotchKa have supported them on tour), as well as other Gypsy Punk acts such as Kultur Shock and Golem. I would classify both DeVotchKa and Beirut as Gypsy Punk bands, firstly for this reason of audience, and also because I am considering Gypsy Punk as a cultural phenomenon rather than simply as a musical genre: the places and people that their music signifies are as important as the way it sounds. Many more bands continue to be tagged with the Gypsy Punk label – even by commentators coming from a strictly musical, rather than a more broadly cultural, standpoint – and a growing number of DJs are playing this style of music on both sides of the Atlantic. But many of the bands and club nights that are appearing are also billed as being 'Balkan', even if – as is the case with Gogol Bordello – there is little or nothing of the Balkans themselves in their band members or influences. Yet while Gogol Bordello are not Balkan in their origins, there are clear allusions to the Balkans in the mythology that they have created, as we will see as we go on to consider Hützovina.

Gogol Bordello are not only affiliated only loosely with the Balkans – their 'gypsy' connections are also rather tenuous. However, their perceived 'gypsy' and Balkan ties nourish one another, since the two are associated both culturally and musically. The fact that the countries with the largest proportions of Roma in their populations are in the Balkans is one obvious reason for this association, but there are also other factors that have helped to perpetuate the linking of Balkan and 'gypsy' music. The notion of 'gypsy music' has long been tied to certain locations, specifically those in Central and Eastern Europe. A. T. Sinclair exemplified this in 1907, when he wrote that 'All Hungarian musicians are Gypsies. All Hungarian music is simply Gypsy music. Liszt states this, and it is true. The statements can be applied to Rumania and Bessarabia with almost as much truth as to Hungary. It is

¹⁰ Carol Silverman: *Romani Routes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.264.

the same in Bulgaria, European Turkey, and the whole Balkan peninsula.’¹¹ This can be read as an example of balkanism: the countries of Eastern Europe are all approached in the same generalised manner, with no effort made to distinguish between Romani music in each of the countries named. Additionally, we find here the notion that all musicians in the Balkans are ‘gypsies’. In the imagined Balkans, the ‘gypsy’ is something of a stock figure. The ‘gypsy’ figure and the Balkans share perceived qualities of roughness, wildness and criminality, and ‘gypsies’ and the Balkans are almost synonymous for many in the West.

Accordingly, much Balkan music has in the past been regarded by Western listeners as ‘gypsy’ music, even if it was neither performed nor informed by Romani musicians. Of course, neither Balkan music nor Romani music can be defined as a single entity. The traditional music of Serbia differs from that of Bulgaria. Similarly, some of the music of Hungarian Roma is unlike the music played by Romani people in Romania. What has long been widely regarded as ‘gypsy’ music in the West is in fact distinct from any of these regional variations: this is a generally instrumental form, typically played on string instruments with perhaps some accordion or woodwind, and associated with both ‘gypsy’ musicians and with the Balkans. ‘Gypsy’ music continues to be thought of as Balkan, and this is perhaps not an unreasonable perception since so much of the music marketed as ‘gypsy’ music in the West has a Balkan origin.

While ‘gypsy’ music has been consumed enthusiastically in Western Europe for many years, music which is Balkan, but which is not produced or performed by Roma is received in a very different way. Indeed, this is a form of music that many in the West have learned to automatically ridicule before actually listening to it. An example of this is the derisive commentaries provided on UK broadcasts of the Eurovision Song Contest by host Terry Wogan, which became an integral part of the show, and which, when deployed during entries from the Balkans, conformed to the views of the West. While people in the West are accustomed to seeing the Roma as excellent musicians, it is presumed that the inhabitants of Balkan countries who are not obviously ‘gypsy’ will be significantly inferior: the region is considered to be comparatively underdeveloped in every aspect, and that extends

¹¹ A. T. Sinclair: ‘Gypsy and Oriental Music’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 20, No. 76 (Jan-Mar 1907), p.16.

as far as its music. What is not understood is that contemporary 'gypsy' music in the Balkans – that is, the music played and listened to by Romani people – is not wholly distinct from the music of the non-Roma. Although Balkan Roma may play a form of music close to the usual Western approximation of 'gypsy' music for non-Roma audiences, they are more likely to listen to music that has pop and electronic influences.

Wogan's ribbing was never confined to the entries from the Balkans, and due to the typically low standard of British entries, it usually extended as far as the home team. However, a particularly anti-Balkan sentiment was visible in 2008, when the contest was held in Belgrade and interval entertainment was provided by Goran Bregović and his Weddings and Funerals Orchestra. For most of the nine minute performance, Wogan talked over the music, keeping the sound turned well down, and at one point suggested that viewers might prefer to fetch refreshments than watch Bregović play. This was Wogan's last year as Eurovision host: he resigned complaining of political voting amongst East European countries, so his antipathy towards Serbian music was probably not grounded entirely in the aesthetic, but his readiness to dismiss Balkan music was certainly apparent. However, this is not the sort of reaction that would normally be expected after a Bregović performance. He is well-known in both Eastern and Western Europe for fusing the sounds of traditional Balkan music with those of rock and pop – in fact he composed Milan Stanković's 2010 Eurovision entry, 'Ovo je Balkan'. Bregović is also associated with 'gypsy' music, and might be said to function as an intermediary between traditional 'gypsy' music and pop and rock. Several famous Romani songs are known to Western audiences because they have been arranged popularised by Bregović. Having launched his musical career playing in rock bands in his native Bosnia, he is now a composer of film music, best known for his collaborations with director Emir Kusturica. Kusturica is also a musician in his own right, and the work both he and Bregović is worthy of examination here, as examples of music and film from within the Balkans that are familiar in the West, and which may contribute to commonly-held Western perceptions of the region.

Bregović and Kusturica have similar backgrounds and have proved to be extremely compatible in terms of their work. They were both born in Sarajevo,

and Kusturica has been described as 'a Bosnian Muslim [who] has opted to stress the Serbian line in his origins'¹²¹³, while Bregović has also settled in Belgrade. Kusturica's films may deal with serious subjects, but they are typically colourful affairs, and present the Balkans in a fashion that undoubtedly contributes to the perceptions that persist today. In addition, they foster the association between the Balkans and the 'gypsy'. Romani characters appear frequently; they are presented as leading madcap lives, surviving on little with help from their ingenuity. The acrobatic ruses of the 'gypsies' combine effectively with Kusturica's prominent inclusion of animals – which tend to either suffer comic misfortune or cause trouble for their human counterparts – and produce the atmosphere of a circus. This is in fact an effective analogy to describe how the Balkans are so often seen by the West; as being contained within a Big Top, which is full of comic chaos and characters both endearing and unsavoury.

Kusturica is also worthy of consideration here for his activity outside of film-making, specifically for his work as a musician. He joined the Serbian band Zabranjeno Pusenje [No Smoking] in the 1980s and, presumably in order to profit from his growing reputation, and to increase their marketability in Anglophone countries, the group changed its name to Emir Kusturica and the No Smoking Orchestra. The band has significant followings in both Eastern and Western Europe, but although they are not Romani, they are thought of by many in the West as a 'gypsy' music group, in an example of 'gypsiness' being ascribed to a Balkan product. Goran Gocić is rather cynical of their work, saying that 'Their CD *Unza Unza Time*, a studio version of the band's tour repertoire, on which Kusturica appears in person, is musically not a match for Bregović's, and the band is something like a poor man's version of Bregović's own Weddings and Funerals Band.'¹⁴ In fact, their sound and their energetic performance style mean that they seem closer to Gogol Bordello than to Bregović.

Kusturica has been making films since the early 1980s, but his

¹² It has also been alleged that his work, particularly his 1995 film *Underground*, which deals with the conflict in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, takes a particularly Serbian stance. Amongst the most outspoken of Kusturica's critics is Alain Finkielkraut. See Finkielkraut: 'L'imposture Kusturica', *Le Monde*, 2 June 1995, p.16.

¹³ Dina Iordanova: *Emir Kusturica* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), p.6.

¹⁴ Goran Gocić: *Notes From the Underground: The Cinema of Emir Kusturica* (London: Wallflower Press, 2001), p.114.

breakthrough came in the early 1990s, when he began to receive greater exposure in the West. He achieved his greatest success in 1995 with *Underground*, for which he was awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes. The film is a study of Yugoslavian history that is set over a period of half a century. This lengthy temporal span is mediated through the characters, whose lives are followed from the Nazi invasion of Belgrade in 1941 through to the conflict in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Also following these characters is a brass band, who play traditional 'gypsy' songs. This is the first of Kusturica's films in which we can observe the circus-like atmosphere that he is often associated with, and the music, replete with fast brass and jaunty 'gypsy' tunes is certainly suited to the circus. As is the case in *Underground*, the music is often diegetic; bands of musicians appear on screen and follow the characters from scene to scene. This construction was repeated in Kusturica's 1998 comedy *Black Cat White Cat*, which is set among a Serbian Roma community.

Ioana Szeman notes that, 'Kusturica's films and Goran Bregović's music represent another reason for the "Balkan" association with the wave of "Gypsy music"'¹⁵ and goes on to say that, 'Many of the bands and festivals of "Gypsy music" in the West seem to have stepped out of these films.'¹⁶ This may be part of a trend for 'gypsy' music to evolve according to the changing whims of its audiences; those non-Roma who have derived their impressions of the Roma from Kusturica's films will expect to see similar kinds of 'gypsies' when they attend a concert of 'gypsy' music. Bregović's music contributes significantly not only to these impressions of the 'gypsy', but also to perceptions of the Balkans. Donna A. Buchanan says of Bregović that in his work from the 1990s, 'he seemed to imagine the Balkans as a frontier musical heaven'¹⁷. If this is the case, then there are numerous commentators who might add that he has assigned the role of God to himself. Gocić takes a more balanced view which describes how he is often portrayed:

Harsher critics claim that Bregović is not really a composer, but a compiler. In fairness his style is eclectic. [...] Bregović's written

¹⁵ Ioana Szeman: "'Gypsy Music" and DeeJays: Orientalism, Balkanism and Romani Musicians', *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Fall 2009), p.103.

¹⁶ Szeman, p.103.

¹⁷ Donna A. Buchanan: "'Oh, Those Turks!" Music, Politics, and Interculturality in the Balkans and Beyond', Buchanan (ed.): *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene*, p.86.

material and inspired arrangements of known folk tunes spring from, and unnoticeably merge with, folklore – but are at the same time unique and usually carry an inexplicably powerful emotional charge.¹⁸

This seems a fair assessment in that although Bregović does reproduce traditional songs, he has also produced a significant amount of original music. But even if he is no plagiarist, it is easy to see how his work invites a potentially unfavourable reception, particularly when taken in conjunction with Kusturica's films. Gogol Bordello's also arguably perpetuates the tendency for the association of the Balkans with 'gypsy' music, performing with the manic joy of Kusturica's characters. But their engagement with the Balkans is more complex when it is manifest in their imaginary country, Hützovina.

The earliest references to Hützovina can be found in Gogol Bordello's first album, *Voi-La Intruder*. This is a loose concept album, divided into two 'movements', the first being entitled 'Songs of Immigration in Voi-La Minor' and the second 'Optzay Pertruder'. It is in the first section that Balkan associations and perceptions are engaged with; the immigration referred to in the second movement's title seems to be a migration away from the Balkans. As such, the Balkans are left behind and consigned to the past by the migrant, but they are dealt with directly in this album. A *New York Times* article, which also included one of the first appearances of the 'Gypsy Punk' designation in mainstream journalism, explained the conceit of *Voi-La Intruder*:

Some songs on the album are based on a novella in broken-English verse that [Hütz] wrote – and lost on a computer, he said – called "Whispering of the Blood." Inspired by Bulgakov's classic of political paranoia, "The Master and Margarita," Mr. Hütz's work is the story of a man on the run in Hützovina, an imaginary Slavic country where the cruelly feudal 17th century merges with the

¹⁸ Gocić, p.112.

cruelly chaotic 21st.¹⁹

It is not clear whether the apparent cruelty of Hützovina is something that Hütz has pointed out to the *New York Times*' writer, or whether the journalist has inferred that it is a cruel place. In fact it is tempting to presume that the latter is the case, since perceptions of the Balkans from beyond the region so often misrepresent the region as a harsh, unwelcoming place. Here, I intend to examine the concept of balkanism, which describes how the Balkan region is perceived by those from outside of it, and consider what exactly the term 'Balkan' signifies. As yet, deviations from the standard Western view of the Balkans seem few and far between. However, the Eastern European living in the West is in the position of being able to reinvent the Balkans in a way that breaks away from the balkanising trope. This is the position of Eugene Hütz, originally from Ukraine, but now based in the West. He has created a mythologised back-story for his band, drawing attention to the fact that it is comprised of migrants and constructing a history for it. One of the most prominent parts of this is Hützovina, which, as we shall see, displays stereotypically Balkan characteristics. Hütz and his colleagues never claim to be from Hützovina – they are completely open about their actual immigrant origins – but references to this country in their material mean that it is tempting for listeners to locate them there. I therefore propose that Hützovina can be thought of as a mythical Balkan homeland – it is an invented place of origin that signifies Gypsy Punk, and which invites alternative, more considered perceptions of the Balkans.

BALKANISM

In the same way that 'gypsy' does not refer only to the Romani people, 'Balkan' does not only signify the peninsula of that name in south-eastern Europe. Similarly, 'Balkan' music is, as we have seen, as indistinct an idea as 'gypsy' music. The application of the term 'Balkan' to bands like Gogol Bordello and DeVotchKa raises the question of what the word signifies, if it is not taken to refer exclusively

¹⁹ Ben Sisario: 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret: A Multinational', *New York Times*, 14 April 2002, p.25.

to the geographical area of the Balkans or any of the countries that make up that region. This is queried by Maria Todorova in her book *Imagining the Balkans*, in which she examines how the Balkans have been perceived by the West, and seeks to answer the question, 'How could a geographical appellation be transformed into one of the most powerful pejorative designations in history, international relations, political science, and, nowadays, general intellectual discourse?'²⁰ This is something that has been questioned by a number of commentators. Why does 'Balkan' indicate not only an area of South-Eastern Europe, but also a lack of civilisation and a tendency towards barbarism? In his history of the Balkans, Misha Glenny points out that 'The Balkans apparently enjoy a special exemption from the rules of stereotyping'²¹, while David A. Norris observes that the people of the Balkans are often presented as 'noble savages'²². Todorova argues that this has been the case throughout Balkan history: 'at the same time that "Balkan" was being accepted and widely used as geographic signifier, it was already becoming saturated with a social and cultural meaning that expanded its signified far beyond its immediate and concrete meaning.'²³

But before we can consider the cultural connotations of 'Balkan', we should establish its geographic parameters, as there have been many variations regarding which countries and areas may be considered to be part of the Balkans. The only entirely constant constituents are Bulgaria and Albania. Yugoslavia was also described unanimously as Balkan, but since that country broke up into separate states in the early 1990s there have been deviations. Slovenia, which lies at the north-western corner of the Balkans, is often omitted²⁴, and Croatia has also been exempted on a few occasions. Romania is almost always regarded as Balkan, but its neighbour to the east, Moldova, is often thought to be beyond the region's outer reaches. Although Turkey is primarily situated outside of Europe, and thus cannot really be part of the Balkans, the part of the Marmara region that is within Europe is generally included. This is largely due to the influence of Ottoman Rule on much

²⁰ Maria Todorova: *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.7.

²¹ Misha Glenny: *The Balkans* (London: Granta, 1999), p.xxi.

²² David A. Norris: *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.viii.

²³ Todorova, p.21.

²⁴ Misha Glenny does not include Slovenia in his history, though he does include every other country that can be conceived of as Balkan. This is the same mapping as that used by Todorova.

of the Balkans; from the fifteenth century until the early twentieth century the region was largely part of the Ottoman Empire, and Todorova has claimed that 'it would not be exaggerated to say that the Balkans are the Ottoman legacy.'²⁵ It is also significant that the word 'Balkan', which originally described a mountain range in Bulgaria, is of Ottoman origin. Greece is included within the Balkans more often than not, but since it was not part of the Ottoman Empire and was never a socialist state, it is sometimes excluded. The great civilisation associated with Attic Greece also conflicts with the stereotype of barbarity that is attributed to the Balkans, another reason for Greece's omission by some.²⁶ It should also be noted that the various historical maps of the Balkans that appear in many books on the subject suggest that the region may have, or at least has had, borders that do not correspond with any current national borders. For example, Glenny's survey opens with a map entitled 'The Balkans, 1804', which includes parts of, though not all of, present day Romania and Serbia.

My own mapping, which is intended as a way of understanding the meaning of 'Balkan' in a musical context, follows the precedent of leaving Greece outside of the Balkans, for the reasons already outlined. In addition, since Greece is a popular destination for Western tourists, it does not have the unknown or 'other' quality of the rest of the region. I also omit Turkey; although the Ottoman Empire undoubtedly shaped the Balkans and existing perceptions of the area, the fact that it was the controlling power in the region makes it very different from the other Balkan countries. The current perceptions of the Balkans that I will go on to examine are largely based on their quasi-colonial status, and this status cannot be applied to Turkey. However, I include all of the formerly Yugoslavian countries, since their Yugoslav histories inform the way that they are perceived. I also include Romania and Moldova, and, of course, Bulgaria and Albania.

For considering the non-geographic connotations of 'Balkan', Todorova's book is a good starting point. She introduces the term 'balkanism', which she

²⁵ Todorova, p.162.

²⁶ In 1991, Christopher Cviic excluded both Greece and Turkey from his study of the Balkans, on the grounds that they had not been communist controlled. However, he does describe them as 'Balkan countries' (p.1). Bideleux and Jeffries also exclude these countries from their rather Eurocentric post-communist history of the Balkans, citing the same reason for omitting Greece, although they do not comment on Turkey. They also exclude Slovenia, describing it as 'more "East Central European" than "Balkan"' (p.21).

describes in relation to Said's notion of orientalism:

First and foremost, they are both discursive formations. Very much like orientalism, the Balkans can serve as a powerful metaphor. Yet, the main difference between the two concepts is the geographic and historical concreteness of the Balkans versus the mostly metaphorical and symbolic nature of the Orient. The lack of a colonial predicament for the Balkans also distinguishes the two, as do questions of race, color, religion, language and gender. The most important distinction, however, is what I perceive as the pull of other essential aspects of the Balkans, which challenge the scholar to deal with the ontology of the Balkans, rather than simply with its metaphoric functions.²⁷

Todorova draws on Milica Bakić-Hayden's essay 'Nesting Orientalisms', in which she considers the Balkans as part of a network of easternness:

The gradation of "Orients" that I call "nesting orientalisms" is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy on which Orientalism is premised. In this pattern, Asia is more "East" or "other" than eastern Europe; within eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most "eastern"; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies.²⁸

If the Balkans have been constructed as an idea as much as they have come about as a place, then we should briefly consider how this came about. Balkan history is relatively short; the term 'Balkan' only came into common use in the early nineteenth century, while most of the region was still part of the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, as Todorova says, the Balkans' 'Ottoman legacy bears first and

²⁷ Todorova, p.194.

²⁸ Milica Bakić-Hayden: 'Nesting Orientalisms', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter 1995), p.917.

foremost the characteristics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'²⁹. This is evident in the fact that the region is thought of as underdeveloped; the Balkans are seen as maintaining a level of civilisation that is of those ages. During this time, Ottoman control was weakening and some of the countries that we are familiar with today – Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania and Bulgaria – became independent states. This gave rise to the term 'Balkanise'; however, Todorova remarks very early on in her book that, 'By the beginning of the twentieth century [...] "Balkanization" not only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian.'³⁰

The Ottoman Empire had always been regarded as non-European, and even as a threat to Europe and Christendom. Its decline was therefore a relief to the powers of Western Europe. But while the Balkan countries that emerged from the Empire's ashes had in a way returned to Europe, they seemed to be tainted by their Ottoman past. They would become even more maligned after 28 June 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo. 'This left an indelible mark on all assessments of the region'³¹, concedes Todorova. But, as Misha Glenny points out, 'The Balkans was never the powder-keg but just one of a number of devices which might have acted as detonator. The powder-keg was Europe itself.'³² Nonetheless, the notion that there was a propensity for war in the Balkans and that the region's peoples were particularly prone to violence and barbarism was bolstered by the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 and the assassination that became the most immediate cause of World War I. This notion persisted throughout the inter-war years and World War II, which saw both German and Soviet occupations in the Balkans.

Then, after 1945, by which time most Balkan countries were Soviet controlled, the term 'Balkan' fell from usage. Now the region was simply part of Eastern Europe, all of which was seen as 'other' due to its communist regimes. As Glenny says, 'The West never properly appreciated how useful the Cold War was:

²⁹ Todorova, p.12.

³⁰ Todorova, p.3.

³¹ Todorova, p.118.

³² Misha Glenny: 'Only in the Balkans', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21 No. 9 (29 April 1999), p.14.

for half a century, it was able to forget the Balkans. They were in that part of Europe for which it thankfully bore no responsibility.’³³ But in the early 1990s the Balkans reappeared and once again became a concern of the West. As the countries tried to extricate themselves from their recent past, and to form stable governments that led them away from socialism and into capitalist Europe, there was further conflict. Reports of the atrocities that took place during the Balkan wars of the 1990s saturated the West; for many, these were shocking but not surprising, since the Balkans were infamous for bloody wars. It has only been since the turn of the twenty-first century that the rest of Europe has begun to accept that the Balkans may be able to be included within its social and cultural borders. Slovenia became part of the European Union in 2004, along with others several Eastern and Central European countries, and Romania and Bulgaria followed in 2007. This development has given rise to the recent conception of the ‘Western Balkans’, used to describe the countries that have not yet joined the EU: all of these countries are expected to accede in the relatively near future.

Bearing in mind these developments, it does not seem inappropriate to echo Misha Glenny’s questions regarding persistent stereotypes:

Why do so many Westerners shake their heads in laughter and despair at the Balkans? Why are the region’s inhabitants seen either as congenitally irrational and bloodthirsty mobs, never happier than when they are slitting the throats of their neighbours, or as incompetent clowns in fanciful uniforms that mysteriously invoke a medieval past?³⁴

But if we are to consider what attributes are seen to exist in the supposedly Balkan music of Gypsy Punk, then it is necessary to examine how the West, that is Western Europe and the United States, sees the Balkans. The Balkans are commonly, though incorrectly, regarded as having several specific characteristics, which I will now consider in turn. I will then move on to examine the use of these characteristics in fictional representations of the Balkans, and their function in

³³ Glenny: ‘Only in the Balkans’, p.12.

³⁴ Glenny: ‘Only in the Balkans’, p.12.

Hützovina. Firstly, the region is thought of as being outside of Europe, and secondly, leading off from this point, there is a lack of clarity concerning its geography and its borders. Thirdly, the area's perceived lack of development means that it is treated as risible and used for comic effect. My fourth characteristic is the widely held notion that the Balkans are a particularly war-torn region; connected to this is the fifth, the belief that there is much corruption and amorality embedded in the area, partially due to the communist legacy of the Balkans.

1) In and out of Europe

As we have seen, the Ottoman influence on the Balkans is one reason why the region is considered to be beyond the strict parameters of Europe. In short, the Balkans are commonly regarded as geographically, but not culturally European: this is essentially a part of the discourse between East and West that has resulted in orientalism, hence Todorova's use of this concept to inform her idea of balkanism. The Balkans are a particularly significant region in that they have often been seen as a bridge between Europe and Asia, and thus between East and West³⁵. They form a border region, separating the unknown and potentially dangerous East from the civilised West. Anything beyond the Western edge of this borderland is thought to share the qualities of the East. However, East and West are not concrete here; the Balkan compass does not have fixed points. Todorova has noted that 'A Serb is an "easterner" to a Slovene, but a Bosnian would be an "easterner" to the Serb although geographically situated to west; the same applies to Albanians who, situated in the western Balkans, are perceived as easternmost by the rest of the Balkan nations.'³⁶ The situation of Greece is also testament to this, as Todorova goes on to point out. Greece is often not considered Balkan, even though it forms the tip of the peninsula, whereas its neighbours to the West and North, Albania and Bulgaria, are resolutely Balkan. It is as though the history of Greece, from its ancient civilisation to its more recent functions as part of the EU and a member of NATO, has rendered it immune from becoming truly Balkan.

³⁵ See Todorova, pp.15-16.

³⁶ Todorova, p.58.

The accession to the EU of a number of Eastern European countries has done little to help the standard view of the Balkans. Among the ten countries to join in 2004 were Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Although Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, Albania and Moldova have yet to be admitted, and Slovenia remains the only formerly Yugoslavian member state. This only heightens the differences between the Balkans and other regions of Eastern Europe. In addition, if EU membership is seen as a necessary for Europeanness – and the fact that almost all geographically European countries are now members means that this is increasingly the case – then the Balkans remain outside. Conceptions of Europe are changing to reflect the growth of the EU but conceptions of the Balkans remain the same. Božidar Jezernik has written that when Western travellers were discovering the Balkans in the nineteenth century, the people who resided there ‘represented what Europeans had been but were no longer allowed to be.’³⁷ This is a sentiment that has persisted through to the present.

2) An uncertain geography

Although Todorova contrasts the ‘the historical and geographical concreteness of the Balkans’ with ‘the intangible nature of the Orient’³⁸, the geography of the Balkans is not clear to many Western onlookers. In fact, as we have seen in Bakić-Hayden’s examination of nesting orientalisms, in which she considers hierarchies of easternness, this is also the case within the Balkans.³⁹ However, these hierarchies cannot necessarily be equated with the geography of the region, as Slavoj Žižek has pointed out:

If you ask, ‘Where do the Balkans begin?’ you will always be told that they begin *down there*, towards the south-east. For Serbs,

³⁷ Božidar Jezernik: *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), p.29.

³⁸ Todorova, p.11.

³⁹ Bakić-Hayden, p.918.

they begin in Kosovo or in Bosnia where Serbia is trying to defend civilised Christian Europe against the encroachments of this Other. For the Croats, the Balkans begin in Orthodox, despotic and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values. For many Italians and Austrians, they begin in Slovenia, the Western outpost of the Slavic hordes.⁴⁰

But the geographical uncertainty that is a feature of the Balkans is by no means confined to the demarcation of the region's borders. This position of not knowing quite where a country is, or being unable to pick it out on the page of an atlas, is one that is often alluded to when the region is being discussed. The fact that borders have tended to change and countries divide with comparative regularity is one reason for the confusion – indeed, this has given rise to the word 'Balkanise', defined by the *OED* as, 'divide (a region or body) into smaller mutually hostile states or groups'⁴¹, and which came into use in the 1920s following the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Wars and then World War I.

Another issue that has caused a lack of thorough understanding about Balkan geography is the heterogeneity of many countries there. Looking back as far as the ninth and tenth centuries, Mark Mazower says that 'The Balkans were too mountainous, too vulnerable and fragmented to make for an easy religious or linguistic homogenisation.'⁴² This suggests that the fragmentation of countries that produced the term 'Balkanise' may be an echo of an extant topographical fragmentation; it is as though the natural geography of the region has made it difficult to form suitable borders there. Whether or not this is the case, Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries state that 'It is [...] untenable simply to blame the much-publicized religious and ethnic heterogeneity of the twentieth-century Balkan

⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek: "'You May!'", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21, No. 6, (18 March, 1999), p.3.

⁴¹ 'Balkanize, v', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/29065053>>

⁴² Mark Mazower: *The Balkans* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), p.48. See also pp.104-127 for further discussion on heterogeneity and the construction of nation states in the Balkans.

states for the recurrent instability and strife which they suffered'⁴³ and go on to argue that this has been subject to some exaggeration. Despite this, the perception that heterogeneity is particularly widespread exists, and this compounds the uncertainty of Balkan geography. From the perspective of the West, it is difficult not only to identify Balkan countries, but also to determine who the inhabitants of each of these countries are.

In addition to changes on the geographical map, the shifting borders that exist between different countries come along with those that exist between fiction and reality, with the result that countries which might have thought of as fictions are sometimes reborn as actual places. As we shall see later on this chapter, this is often exploited by writers – the Transylvania of the Dracula myth, for example, is all the more sinister for being a place that is not quite real but not quite fictional: although it is a real place, it is a region rather than a country, and its exact geography, history and politics are mysterious. A more recent example is the parodic travel guide *Molvania: A Land Untouched by Modern Dentistry*, which also played on the uncertain geography of the region. Clearly a contraction of Moldova and Transylvania, its name is an example of the blur between fictional and actual places. Published in an almost identical format to recognisable travel guides such as *Lonely Planet* and *Rough Guide*, much of the humour in the book comes from the fact that one can imagine the uninformed believing that Molvania is a real place.

3) The Balkans used for comic effect

Molvania is also a good example of the way in the Balkan region is often presented as a place that is rather risible, being comically undeveloped. *Molvania* uses this precedent to its advantage from the book's introduction, which invites visitors to the country to 'share a glass of locally brewed *zeerstum* (garlic brandy) while watching a traditionally-dressed peasant labourer beat his mule'⁴⁴, through descriptions of budget airlines 'for those prepared to travel without the luxury of

⁴³ Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries: *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.xii.

⁴⁴ Santo Cilauro, Tom Gleisner and Rob Sitch: *Molvania* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), p.8.

in-flight dining or navigation equipment'⁴⁵, to the country's accommodation options: 'despite the low rates all rooms have TV, although the only one that works would appear to be in the manager's office where it is permanently tuned to loud and surprisingly aggressive game shows.'⁴⁶ But the humour is not simply one-sided. Although elements of balkanism are incorporated for comic effect, the satire also takes in the format of the tourist guidebook and its consumers. Molvania is presented not only as being risible on its own terms; there is also humour in the context of tourism. Visitors to this underdeveloped and inferior country are lampooned for their willingness to submit themselves to its unwelcoming environment. This indicates that even when the Balkans are not the sole subject of the humour, they have been used for comic purposes.

We can find a similar example of this in the film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. This film is based around comedian Sacha Baron-Cohen's character Borat Sagdiyev, a Kazakh journalist, and occupies an interesting place in the discourse of balkanism. It portrays Borat leaving his home in Kazakhstan and travelling to America to produce a documentary about its culture for Kazakh television. Like many Balkan characters, he is a noble savage; we are supposed to laugh at his lack of understanding of the West.

Although Borat is from a place that is geographically and culturally distinct from the Balkans, the Kazakhstan presented in *Borat* is a fiction. The scenes that take place in Borat's Kazakh village were filmed in the Romanian village of Glod, an undeveloped place of horse-drawn carts and unsurfaced roads. Although Glod is physically much nearer to the West than Kazakhstan, it supplies the desired effect of a primitive culture, devoid of twenty-first century comforts and technologies. It succeeds in this, but the revelation that Romania is standing in for Kazakhstan draws attention to the fact that to a considerable extent, locations within the Eurasian landmass between Hungary and Afghanistan are seen as interchangeable. Moreover, rural Romania ends up being the butt of the joke here, being misrepresented and exploited for its outward appearance. Although some of the residents of Glod attempted a lawsuit against *Borat's* producers, their claim was

⁴⁵ Cilauro et al., p.39.

⁴⁶ Cilauro et al., p.135.

rejected. Dickie Wallace has suggested that the use of Balkan characteristics in *Borat* ensures that "The character is close enough that viewers can comprehend him without having to bridge an overly wide cultural gap to reach Borat's absurd "reality"; they find him familiarly exotic and thus perhaps more consumable as a media image.'⁴⁷

4) A war-torn region?

Caught up with the sense of a place that is exotic but inferior is the notion that the Balkans are a war-torn region; this is perhaps the most commonly held stereotype. The people of the Balkans are seen as less civilised than those in the West, and the idea that they are prone to war and violence is offered as evidence for this. Although the recent conflict in former Yugoslavia is the most obvious cause of this at present, it is by no means a recent perception. A 1909 book by William Howard-Flanders entitled *Balkania: A Short History of the Balkan States* turns out – though its title seems to suggest that the book will offer a general overview – to be little more than an account of the conquests and conflict that have occurred in the Balkans in the past 2000 years. He concludes by declaring that more war is imminent, but that if the West becomes involved then it might be avoidable: 'A small match would suffice to set the whole Peninsula in flames, but the great hope of a peaceful solution is the love and peace shown by his most gracious Majesty Edward VII, whom may God long preserve!'⁴⁸ Although this account shows a rather unenlightened view of the relationship between the Balkans and Western Europe, this is typical of the era and, in fact, many more recent histories have tended to concentrate on conflict.

Sadly, Howard-Flanders was proved correct about the likelihood of war in the Balkans shortly after his book was published. The first Balkan War occurred in 1912-13 as a reaction to the control of the Ottoman Empire, and the second Balkan War of 1913, which lasted little more than a month, was really an after effect of the first war, in which negotiations over territories were finalised in combat. Soon

⁴⁷ Dickie Wallace: 'Hyperrealizing "Borat" with the Map of the European "Other"', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring 2008), p.35.

⁴⁸ William Howard-Flanders: *Balkania* (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p.99.

afterwards, World War I broke out, commencing with declaration of war on Serbia by Austria-Hungary. It is important to note that this was an invasion from the west and that subsequent conflict within the Balkans involved Western armies; as such, it is difficult to argue that the people of the Balkans are any more belligerent than those of Western Europe. Certainly, the involvement of the West has rarely served to extinguish any fires that had their roots in the region. The most recent wars in the Balkans took place in Kosovo in the late 1990s. This was the climax of tensions that had existed throughout the twentieth century. Although this conflict was the result of a territorial dispute within the Balkans, we should note that representation and coverage of this war in the West escalated following the NATO campaign against Serbia. It was therefore another Western attack on the Balkans that contributed to continued Western perceptions of the Balkans as war-torn. A decade on, repercussions are still being felt throughout the international community as Kosovo's independence is gradually recognised.

5) Corruption, amorality and the Soviet legacy

The notion of a region that is corrupt and amoral is closely related to the conception of a war-torn environment. This also results from embedded perceptions of the Balkan population as savage and uncivilised. Bideleux and Jeffries cite corrupt systems as hindrances to the recovery of the Balkans from the communist era: 'The main impediments which have damaged and constrained the democratization and liberalization of the post-Communist Balkan states [...] have been the closely inter-linked legacies of deeply entrenched "vertical" power structures, "vertical" power relations, ethnic collectivism and pervasive clientelism, corruption and gangsterism.'⁴⁹ They go on to speak of:

the threat posed by the gangsterish, predatory and ostensibly 'ethnic nationalist' paramilitary movements which (once entrenched in power in particular localities) not only targeted former old neighbours transmogrified into "enemies", but

⁴⁹ Bideleux and Jeffries, p.8.

increasingly preyed upon “their own people” as well by engaging in mafia-style protection rackets, drug-dealing, arms-smuggling, sex-slavery and people trafficking.⁵⁰

While these activities have indeed caused problems in the Balkans, another problem is caused by repeated reference to the corruption that is so often presented as being inherent in the region. As we can see in the parody *Molvania*, a Western visitor to the Balkans might feel that they are more at risk from thieves and con-artists, and that they are in a place where corruption thrives.

However, this has become part of the allure of the Balkans: while the Orient has its exotic sexuality, the Balkans is seen as place with a looser sense of morality, where the police can be paid off with a packet of cigarettes and one might commit greater transgressions with impunity. This has been applied not only to the Balkans and its inhabitants, but to people who originate there: an example of this is the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV*, whose main character Niko Bellic is a war veteran from the Balkans (his name, which is in itself suggestive of war, reinforces the stereotype of a war-torn Balkans), who is presumed to be Serbian. In common with all the titles in the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, the gamer is encouraged to carry out carjackings, assaults and all manner of other offences; in this case it seems that the Balkan identity of the player, and their traumatic background, permits them to behave in a usually inexcusable manner. In a context that is both less savage and less fantastical, the roots of Eugene Hütz give him an appeal that stems from a Balkan potential for misdemeanour, which is heightened by his punk associations. As we shall see, it is arguable that Hütz is attempting to construct a Balkan persona for himself, despite the fact that he is not from the Balkans. Violence and corruption are so deeply associated with the region that these associations persisted even during the Cold War, when the term ‘Balkan’ was largely dormant. Glenny observes how “The politically loaded term, the Balkans, would resurface only on rare occasions when murder and intrigue cast a shadow over the otherwise placid order of south-eastern Europe”⁵¹, and cites the assassination of the Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov, who was killed with a

⁵⁰ Bideleux and Jeffries, p.14.

⁵¹ Glenny: *The Balkans*, p.xxiv.

poison-tipped umbrella in London in 1978, as an example of this.

Although the Balkans were generally thought of as a part of communist South-Eastern Europe for almost half of the twentieth century, rather than being a distinct region, the current Western view of the Balkans is heavily informed by this period. The Balkans are regarded as having been blighted by communist occupation, which is seen as having fostered corruption and resulted in widespread amorality. Of course, the actual situations varied from country to country and government to government: Tito's Yugoslavia, for example, was quite different to Ceaușescu's Romania. However, the commonly held Western view was that the communist countries were very much alike, and this view persists more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War. It is arguable that communism hid the Balkan states from the West behind an iron curtain, keeping them out of Europe, and ensuring that accurate portrayals of these countries were not available to the West. But in fact, the Balkans were thought of as alien long before the communist era, although communism certainly did not help to bring the area any closer to the capitalist West. Although the legacy of communism still affects perceptions of the Balkans, there have undoubtedly been improvements for the people of the Balkan countries since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. Bulgarian critic Yonka Krasteva sums up the extent of these changes:

Post-communist society has vastly extended the possibilities for people to redefine themselves through new political loyalties, new kinds of lifestyles and occupations. This, however, does not mean that they are fully free to choose a new identity, or even to articulate their sense of identity. The self-conception of these people, both at home and abroad, is being shaped by the way in which the West perceives them, and by the images that Western media disseminate for global consumption.⁵²

This is an important point: any detrimental effects that the legacy of communism

⁵² Yonka Krasteva: 'Western Writing and the (Re)Construction of the Balkans after 1989: The Bulgarian Case', Andrew Hammond (ed.): *The Balkans and the West* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.97-109. (97)

has on the inhabitants of the Balkans are more likely to be the result of Western perceptions than of the recent history of the region.

BALKAN FICTIONS

Western perceptions of the Balkans are very much apparent in the fictional country of Hützovina. Gogol Bordello draw attention to the ways in which the Balkans have been perceived through history by creating a Balkan country that seems to bear many of the characteristics that are often imposed on the region. But in Hützovina we do not encounter a continuation of perceptions from outside: Gogol Bordello create a mythology around Hützovina that connects it to the West, drawing the Balkans closer to the Western audience. In addition, they reveal how the Balkans and the Roma have been subject to similar forms of prejudice.

However, Gogol Bordello's engagement with the Balkans is not confined to Hützovina. The 2004 album *J.U.F.*, a collaboration with another New York immigrant band, Balkan Beat Box, references the region several times.⁵³ Like Gogol Bordello, Balkan Beat Box address the Balkans in their work – most directly in the name they have chosen to use – without being Balkan themselves; they are in fact Israeli migrants. Their founder member Ori Kaplan explains that this name derived from some of their material from their first album, released in 2005: 'We had Bulgarian singers – the Balkan part, and beats made on a computer – so that was the beat box. Of course you won't find our aesthetic in the Balkans, and it's wrong to think of us as Balkan Beats – that's not our style.'⁵⁴ But even if they are not Balkan Beats musicians, they have continued to engage with Balkan music, and have featured guest musicians from the Balkans throughout their work.⁵⁵

J.U.F. stands for Jüdisch-Ukrainische Freundschaft – the name is an homage to the German punk band D.A.F. (Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft) – but the

⁵³ This album is in fact credited as being by Gogol Bordello vs. Tamir Muskat. Ori Kaplan, who had played saxophone with Gogol Bordello would go on to form Balkan Beat Box with producer Tamir Muskat shortly after the release of *J.U.F.* As a result, it sounds very much like a proto-Balkan Beat Box record with input from Gogol Bordello.

⁵⁴ Alan Ashton-Smith: 'One Route for the Whole World to Go On: An Interview With Balkan Beat Box', *PopMatters.com*, 5 August 2010 <<http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/124224-one-route-for-the-whole-world-to-go-on-an-interview-with-balkan-beat/>>

⁵⁵ See Chapter Two for a deeper analysis of Balkan Beats music and how it intersects with Gypsy Punk.

Balkans are a prominent presence on the album, in both the traditional music that is appropriated, and the lyrical content. Merely reading the track-listing provides an impression of how far this is the case: it includes one song called 'Super Rifle (Balkan Express Train Robbery)', and another called 'Roumania'. However, the album's most interesting comment on the Balkans is in 'Balkanization of Amerikanization'. In the chorus of this song, Hütz presents an image of the Balkans that shows how the region is seen in the West, characterising it as a place of war and human trafficking:

Where the virgins disappear
And the soldiers die
Yeah, I go there every day
And back I arrive.

Further through the song he talks of 'Balkanizatia' and 'How it all reflected Amerikanizatia'. This is a direct reference to the construction of the Balkans by the West and, combined with the song's title, suggests an almost postcolonial reclamation of the Balkans. The word 'Balkanisation' was first used in the early twentieth century to describe the fragmentation of a country or region; Hütz here places the word in a more contemporary context, comparing it with Western-influenced globalisation and suggesting that this has some responsibility for current perceptions of the Balkans. However, the title 'Balkanization of Amerikanization' suggests that Western culture is becoming fragmented, and perhaps losing its potency as a result. This could be taken as a comment on the postmodern era that Gogol Bordello pitched themselves against in their manifesto.

The idea of an alternative form of balkanisation calls to mind the ideas of the anarchist writer Andrej Grubačić, who continues to consider himself Yugoslav despite the dissolution of that country. Grubačić contrasts the concept of 'balkanization from above' with that of 'balkanization from below': while the former refers to the way that the Balkans are perceived from outside, the latter describes a populist reform of the region in which control is passed to the people who inhabit it. He describes balkanization from above as 'a project, largely

consistent in history, of breaking Balkan interethnic solidarity and regional socio-cultural identity; a process of violently incorporating the region into the system of nation-states and capitalist world-economy; and contemporary imposition of neoliberal colonialism.⁵⁶ However, it is his assertion that central to the concept is a 'deep-seated cultural derision of the Balkan peoples'⁵⁷ that reveals that balkanization from above is comparable to Todorova's notion of balkanism. Balkanization from below, on the other hand, is 'an alternate process of territorial organization, decentralization, territorial autonomy, and federalism.'⁵⁸ While Gogol Bordello's approach to the Balkans is far less politicised, it also introduces an alternative to the practices of balkanism or balkanization from above, as we will go on to see.

Gogol Bordello's creation of Hützovina serves a specific function within the mythology and politics of Gypsy Punk, but it is by no means the only example of a fictional Balkan country; the region has provided a source of inspiration for many writers and artists seeking a suitable setting for their works. An overview of some of these texts can be found in Vesna Goldsworthy's book *Inventing Ruritania*, in which she considers how images of the Balkans have been produced by the West and have come to define and fuel perceptions of the region. She notes that 'The Balkan worlds of popular imagination are peopled by British creations. Bram Stoker's Transylvania and Anthony Hope's Ruritania are arguably the best known brand names produced in this imaginative takeover of the Balkans.'⁵⁹ Later, she point out that such fictions have informed perceptions of the region more than reportage: 'Hope and Stoker have been infinitely more influential in shaping the way the Balkans are seen in the West than have any number of scholarly or well-travelled authors.'⁶⁰

There are clearly connections to be made with Todorova's concept of balkanism here, and the practice of balkanism and the phenomenon of the fictional Balkan state can be seen together in one recent example. This is a map produced by *The Economist*, which purports to redraw Europe in a more current and logical

⁵⁶ Andrej Grubačić: *Don't Mourn, Balkanize!* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), p.43.

⁵⁷ Grubačić, p.42.

⁵⁸ Grubačić, p.258.

⁵⁹ Vesna Goldsworthy: *Inventing Ruritania* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1998), p.x.

⁶⁰ Goldsworthy, p.10.

manner, with various countries switching places. In the Balkans, there are several shifts: Croatia and Slovenia move north-west, further into Europe, while Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania rotate, apparently in order to achieve greater national homogeneity. On the other hand, 'Bosnia is too fragile to move and will have to stay where it is.'⁶¹ Here, the Balkans are redrawn so as to conform more readily to the West's ideal image of the region. However, the Balkans are also enlarged on this map, as several fictional countries are added: these include Borduria and Syldavia, from Hergé's Tintin comics, and Anthony Hope's Ruritania.

Hope's Balkan country initially appeared in his novel *The Prisoner of Zenda*, a tale of intrigue and mistaken identity set in a European royal court, which was first published in 1894. Although it may lend its name to the title of Goldsworthy's book, she points out that Ruritania is presented as more Germanic than Balkan.⁶² However, the name Ruritania has entered standard usage as a generic, if slightly derisive, name for a Balkan country or the Balkans as a whole; this indicates that the qualities of Ruritania, with its totalitarian regime and history of conflict, are seen as eminently Balkan. Hope was evidently aware of the appeal of the Balkan location, as we can discern from Goldsworthy's assessment of his 1906 adventure novel, *Sophy of Kravonia*: 'Moving on to create yet another imaginary kingdom, he placed it this time explicitly in the Balkans, calling it with perhaps unintentional humour Kravonia (meaning, in Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian, the 'Land of Cows').'⁶³ Within the realms of popular fiction, Goldsworthy identifies four major kinds of narrative set in the Balkans: royalist adventure romances, such as Hope's novels; the gothic tale, for example, *Dracula*; the Balkan spy story, such as John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*; and the 'Orient Express' narrative, of which Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* is the most obvious example.⁶⁴

All of these forms display many of the common perceptions of the Balkans that we have already examined. The royalist romance, for example, tends to portray a war-torn kingdom that is saved from self-destruction by the involvement of a Western visitor, and spy and mystery novels present the region as corrupt and

⁶¹ 'Redrawing the Map', *Europe.view* – *Economist.com*, 29 April 2010

<http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=16003661>

⁶² Goldsworthy, p.48.

⁶³ Goldsworthy, p.49.

⁶⁴ Goldsworthy, pp.42-111.

barbarian. The gothic tale plays on Western uncertainty about the geography of the Balkans; Goldsworthy explains that 'the Gothic plot requires a setting which is sufficiently close to the reader to appear threatening, while nevertheless being alien enough to house all the exotic paraphernalia – the castles, the convents, the caverns, the dark forests at midnight, the mysterious villains and the howling spectres.'⁶⁵ The Balkans fulfils this function perfectly, with Bram Stoker's Transylvania being the best known example of such a location. Transylvania is in fact on the very edge of the Balkans, in north-western Romania, but as a result of its appearance in *Dracula*, it is thought of as a mysterious, threatening, and wholly Balkan place. Goldsworthy cites the region's proximity to the West as the reason why it is suitably threatening, but its uncertain geography and location are equally relevant.

Goldsworthy's book covers these and many more examples of fictional renderings of the Balkans produced by the West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, as the twentieth century advanced and the politics of the Balkans underwent various changes, Balkan fictions evolved to reflect this. Hergé's Tintin books provide a useful transition between Goldsworthy's examples and later texts. His fictional countries, Syldavia and Borduria, were introduced in 1938 in *King Ottokar's Sceptre*, in which Borduria attempts to annex Syldavia. The narrative follows the conventions of novels like *The Prisoner of Zenda*; the volatile situation in the Balkans is resolved by a Westerner – in this case the Belgian Tintin. The two countries reappear in the 1956 comic *The Calculus Affair*. While Syldavia is presented here as an ally of the West, Borduria, which in 1938 was a fascistic state comparable with Nazi Germany, now shows signs of communist rule. For example, it has a totalitarian military ruler named Kurvi-Tasch, who is widely celebrated with statues. Additionally, the national symbol of Borduria changes from being an hourglass-shaped object in the pre-war books to the Stalinist moustache of Kurvi-Tasch.⁶⁶

The communist Balkans are also dealt with in Malcolm Bradbury's 1983 novel *Rates of Exchange*, which is set in the fictional country of Slaka. The novel

⁶⁵ Goldsworthy, p.75.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, the original French name of Kurvi-Tasch is Plekszy-Glasz; more attention is drawn to the Stalinesque moustache in the English translation.

follows its protagonist, Angus Petworth, on a lecture tour of Slaka – ‘climbing an academic version of the Ruritanian throne’⁶⁷, says Goldsworthy – and the country’s oppressive regime and lack of modern comforts are used extensively for comic effect. Andrew Hammond describes it as ‘a text ostensibly exploring the postmodernist concerns of language, image-making and the cultural embeddedness of human experience, but more obviously engaged in taking an amused dig at the Eastern bloc.’⁶⁸ Slaka reappears in a spin-off text that Bradbury later wrote, a spoof tourist guide not unlike *Molvania*, called *Why Come to Slaka?* In the introduction, which is purportedly written by Petworth, we are told:

As for Slaka, I have to confess that I had never heard of it, thought it was somewhere quite different, and had never identified it on the map. This, perhaps, is not surprising, since it has frequently not been on it, having been often occupied by one or other of its nearer or further neighbours.⁶⁹

In this passage we find a highly condensed version of the standard Western view of the Balkans: a place of uncertain geography that has been blighted by conflict and communism. *Molvania*, which has an almost identical structure to *Why Come to Slaka?*, functions in the same manner; even though it was published several years after the fall of communism its writers are keen to use the communist legacy for comic effect. For example, when the national flag of Molvania is discussed, we are told that ‘After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Molvania was the only ex-Soviet state to retain the hammer and sickle.’⁷⁰

It is worth appending here that there is one precedent for Gogol Bordello’s Hützovina from beyond the Balkans. This derives from the numerous suggestions posited throughout history that the Roma should have a fixed homeland. Early activists put forward the idea of a ‘Romanestan’, a utopian state that the Roma might inhabit as their own territory, and which might be comparable with Israel.

⁶⁷ Goldsworthy, p.73.

⁶⁸ Andrew Hammond: ‘“The Red Threat”: Cold War Rhetoric and the British Novel’, Hammond (ed.): *The Balkans and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.52.

⁶⁹ Malcolm Bradbury: *Why Come to Slaka?* (London: Picador, 2000), p.5.

⁷⁰ Cilauro, Gleisner & Sitch, p.17.

The idea of Romanestan was most prominent in the 1930s, and was associated with the figure of the 'gypsy king', a construct intended to give the Roma greater credence among non-Roma. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov have described how various prominent Roma using the title 'King of the Gypsies' sought to claim territory in Africa and India.⁷¹ However, the proposal of Romanestan was doomed to failure, as there was insufficient unity amongst those attempting to establish this country. In addition, the idea of a fixed and newly created homeland for the Roma, even if it was one in which they had greater autonomy, would be akin to the ghettoization that they are already subjected to. The notion of relocating the Romani population to Africa certainly seems a dubious one in retrospect; it is somewhat reminiscent of the Nazi plan to relocate Europe's Jews to Madagascar. Yet Romanestan is interesting as an imaginary country. While Hützovina is presented with Balkan characteristics and has few explicitly Romani elements, its function within the Gypsy Punk genre means that Romanestan may be considered part of its context.

'WELCOME TO THE HÜTZOVINA BORDER'

As we have already established, neither the personnel nor the music of Gogol Bordello is especially Balkan. However, the invented country that was referenced in their first two albums, Hützovina, has characteristics that match those we have identified as Balkan. I would contend that rather than fitting into the discourse of balkanism that we encountered with reference to other representations of the region, Hützovina has been intentionally portrayed in this way. Indeed, Hützovina is not perpetuating balkanism, but commenting on the way that the Balkans, along with other parts of Eastern Europe, have historically been perceived.

Hützovina is on the face of it not dissimilar from most Balkan states created in the West. As we recall, it was described in the *New York Times* as 'an imaginary Slavic country where the cruelly feudal 17th century merges with the cruelly

⁷¹ Elena Mariushiakova and Vesselin Popov: 'The Roma – A Nation Without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies', Wojciech J. Burszta, Tomasz Kamusella and Sebastian Wojciechowski (eds.): *Nationalisms Across the Globe: An Overview of Nationalisms in State-Endowed and Stateless Nations* (Poznan: School of Humanities and Journalism, 2005), p.438.

chaotic 21st':⁷² the points made by Todorova⁷³ and Glenny,⁷⁴ who both note that the Balkans offer an escape to a more primitive, almost medieval, culture is borne out in this mingling of the seventeenth century and the present day. The name 'Hützovina' is also significant; Hütz has given his own name to this country and this serves to make him a figure representative of the Balkans, whether or not this is the intended result. Of course, Hütz is not actually from the Balkans, but by attaching himself to the region in this way he draws attention to the non-specific composite that the West makes of Eastern European locations. Hützovina is thus a place where presumptions about the Balkans are realised; the fictionality of the location draws attention to the falseness of such perceptions. A short paragraph on the back cover of *Voi-La Intruder* provides some background information about the country:

The police arrested Voi-La Intruder, no occupation, a resident of Hützovina, after he had stolen sacred objects from Ukrainian Church of Bombon. He denies that he has committed the thefts and claims that he entered those establishments solely out of love for the motherland and interest in sacred objects.⁷⁵

Even in this short passage, we find evidence of the uncertain geography of the Balkan region, and references to its common portrayal as a region that is both of and outside of Europe. Voi-La Intruder is a resident of Hützovina, but is accused of theft from a Ukrainian church. Whether this church is located in Ukraine, or whether it is a Ukrainian church in Hützovina, is not specified and it is also unclear whether the motherland referred to is Hützovina or Ukraine. Hützovina seems to be in equal parts Soviet and Balkan, and its portrayal as a border region – and as such a microcosm of the Balkans – is thus realised. The country first appears in Gogol Bordello's debut album, *Voi-La Intruder*, but it is reintroduced in their second album, *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, in a song called 'Occurrence on the

⁷² Sisario, p.25.

⁷³ Todorova, p.14.

⁷⁴ Glenny: 'Only in the Balkans', p.12.

⁷⁵ *Voi-La Intruder* album sleeve (Rubric Records, 1999).

Border (Hopping on a Pogo-Gypsy Stick)'. The allusion to the border in this song's title can be interpreted as referring not only to the border of Hützovina but also to the Balkans as a whole.

The Soviet elements of Hützovina are also relevant when we recall that the Soviet legacy is frequently invoked in Balkan fictions. This is tied to notions of amorality and corruption, which we find in the description of Hützovina in the reference to theft and the false arrest of Voi-La Intruder. However, Voi-La Intruder himself is not presented as amoral or criminal, though in the title track he is referred to as 'a nomad and intruder' – two words which readily lend themselves to portrayals of the exotic or unknown. The fact that the character maintains his innocence is ambiguous: if he is in fact guilty then the suggestion might be that the people of Hützovina are dishonest. However, presuming that he is innocent, Hützovina comes across as a land where the ordinary people are honest and decent, and if there is any squalor and corruption, then it can be found in the hands of the authorities. Perhaps this is the more likely scenario, for this is a country in which the political situation seems to have a direct and oppressive effect on the day to day lives of its residents.

This is evoked most strongly in the song 'Passport', the story of a challenging border crossing. Since 'Passport' is categorised in *Voi-La Intruder's* tracklisting as a 'song of immigration' this is presumably an attempt to leave Hützovina for good. The song includes the lyrics: 'I've got a passport, officer / This time you ain't getting what you want', and 'Where is your friend now, officer? / That sharp good looking lieutenant / That got vacation cause he shot my friend'. The picture painted here is of an unreasonable and violent police force or border guard, and along with the potentially false arrest of the Voi-La Intruder character, it suggests a state in which life is needlessly hard, plagued with bureaucratic difficulties and lacking the comforts of the West. While this is of course a fictional representation, it is grounded in the reality of balkanism, and presents a hyperrealised version of the Balkans.

Hütz has described Hützovina as 'that mythical fuckstain on the east side of

Mama-Europa's cunt where Strindberg and Severniy met.'⁷⁶ This is a dense and mysterious description that ostensibly adheres to the trend of representing the Balkans as a place with an uncertain geography. The key to decoding Hützovina, however, is the admission that it is mythical. David A. Norris has written about the notion of a Balkan myth, stating that 'The source of the Balkan myth lies in the West.'⁷⁷ Hützovina is intended as a symbol for the Western vision of the Balkans; like the broader Gypsy Punk mythology that we will consider in the next chapter, it is mythical on two levels, firstly as a myth unto itself, and secondly as a critique of an existing myth. The crude and oblique way in which Hütz talks about the country aligns it with the Western myth but also leaves enough unsaid that a distinct myth about Hützovina can be formed.

In addition, Hütz's description draws attention to the border function that the Balkans are often thought to serve, in this case acting as a meeting point between the different figures and cultures represented by Strindberg and Severniy. What is meant by the latter of these is uncertain; 'северный' is the Russian word for northern, so it could be no more than a geographical designation, though one as unspecific as the geography of the Balkans is often perceived to be. Perhaps it is more likely to refer to the Russian singer of criminal songs Arkady Severniy, who would fit very comfortably into the setting of Hützovina, having an association with the underworld, but not an active involvement with it. The sombreness of Strindberg's work means that he shares the qualities of unease that are ascribed to the Balkans, and his rendezvous with Severniy could facilitate a number of other meetings relevant to Gogol Bordello's work, between music and drama, high and low culture, and East and West. Hützovina is very much a place of intercultural convening then, possibly signifying the moment when the West is injected into the East, or perhaps, in an echo of Hütz's immigration, the moment when the East was injected into the West. Either way, it is clear that Hütz is not pandering to Western perceptions. If anything, he is satirising them, creating a place that fulfils expectations about the Balkans, but also adding surprises.

Inside the cover of *Voi-La Intruder* is a map of Hützovina, surrounded by

⁷⁶ Origins: Hatha Moda, *Gogol Bordello website*:

http://gogolbordello.com/chronicles/origins/imageviewer.php?jpg=origins_chap11.jpg

⁷⁷ Norris, p.11.

images that are presumably intended as illustrations of events taking place there. All of these are taken from photographs of Gogol Bordello's theatrical early performances, and each is linked to the map by a line joined to a burning flame drawn somewhere upon it. At the centre of the map, marked by a blazing log, is the capital city, Pizdetz. The image linked to this site is of Hütz, standing arms held aloft, wearing a goat mask. Another burning log is superimposed over his crotch; this detail serves to sexualise the image of the Balkans as it appears in Hützovina. Todorova has said that in balkanism there is 'none of the accompanying luridness and overtly sexual overtones of orientalism'⁷⁸, but the images of Hützovina presented here suggest a hedonism that diverges from this. The name 'Pizdetz' also plays a significant part in the construction of Hützovina. This word is a derivative of 'пизда', one of the key words in the vulgar Russian slang lexicon known as *mat* and the Russian equivalent of the English word 'cunt', and Hütz has said that it can be 'literally translated as cunt-kaput, but with a mystical overtone to it'.⁷⁹ Although Hütz's understanding of the word will be from Russian or Ukrainian, 'пизда' or 'pizda' is also used in Serbo-Croat and Romanian. The notion that the Balkans is a place of barbarism and depravity is strengthened through the use of this vulgar language, but understanding the insinuations behind Pizdetz requires knowledge of a Balkan or Slavic language. This suggests that Western treatment of the Balkans (and to an extent Russia) is being satirised here in a way that is not immediately knowable to most Westerners.

However, there is also a Western allusion in Pizdetz: it is the name of a Lower East Side bar where Gogol Bordello played a number of gigs in their early years and began to gain fame.⁸⁰ In common with so many fictional locations, Hützovina has elements that are strongly rooted in reality; in this case, however, the reality that provides the foundations is not exclusively Balkan. A location in multicultural New York is thus relocated into a mythological Balkan state, and we find an exchange between East and West. This reveals a subversion of balkanism

⁷⁸ Todorova, p.14

⁷⁹ Origins: Pizdetz – First NY Year, *Gogol Bordello website*
http://gogolbordello.com/chronicles/origins/imageviewer.php?jpg=origins_chap3.jpg

⁸⁰ Another of Gogol Bordello's New York haunts, a Bulgarian bar called Mehanata that holds 'Balkan' club nights, has been incorporated into the Gypsy Punk mythology, with its former location on the corner of Broadway and Canal Street being referenced in lyrics, and images from events at the bar appearing in artwork.

in which a fictional Balkan country is partially informed by an element from the West that has associations with the actual Balkans. The genuine Pizdetz becomes mythologised, while the fictional Pizdetz that forms part of Hützovina reclaims the Balkans from Western balkanism, concealing the meaning of its name from the West.

Pizdetz, and Hütz's statement about Hützovina, are also significant as ways of raising perceptions of gender in the Balkans. Božidar Jezernik includes 'disregard for women' in his list of qualities often associated with the Balkans, alongside 'conspiracy, unscrupulousness' and 'overzealous bureaucracy'.⁸¹ Misogyny is another characteristic ascribed to the apparently uncivilised Balkan people and describing a Balkan country as a 'fuckstain on the east side of Mama-Europa's cunt' brings this to the fore. However, Todorova has observed that 'Unlike the standard orientalist discourse, which resorts to metaphors of its object of study as female, the balkanist discourse is singularly male'.⁸² Gogol Bordello seem to adhere to the maleness of this discourse in terms of gender: they are a predominantly male band in which the female members have a less substantial role. But with Pizdetz as the name of its capital and 'Mama-Europa's cunt' as a marker of its geography, Hützovina is presented through female metaphors. The language used is certainly problematic with regards to the way it presents Balkan femininity, but it is nonetheless a deviation from standard balkanism.

We have considered the manner in which representations of the Balkans are often used for comic purposes, and Hützovina is not unequivocally an exception to this trend. Although the situations that are encountered in Gogol Bordello's Balkan setting – theft, false accusations, bureaucratic difficulties and restrictions on free movement – are unpleasant and undesirable, there is a certain humour in the apparently incidental detail of their presentation. In the lyrics of 'Passport', the 'sharp good looking lieutenant / who got vacation cause he shot my friend' is later reduced to a figure of ridicule when 'His wife got acne and his children cry'. There is also humour in the place names used by Gogol Bordello, such as the church of Bombon (the Spanish word for chocolate) and even in the crudeness of Pizdetz. However, the fact that this is Slavic word that is meaningless

⁸¹ Jezernik, p.26.

⁸² Todorova, p.15.

to most Westerners means that the Balkans avoid being the butt of the joke – it is instead onlookers from outside who are mocked.

The map of Hützovina is not the only part of *Voi-La Intruder's* sleeve that merits attention regarding the portrayal of the Balkans; the rest the album's artwork is also of interest. The front cover is dominated by a bleak, red-tinted landscape in which the main points of interest are the face of Hütz, contorted into a frightened grimace, and the silhouette of a large bird of prey. This generates the impression of the difficult Balkan lifestyle suggested in some of the lyrics on the album – including those from 'Passport'. When the album sleeve is opened up beyond the map, we find a triptych of black and white photographs. The first of these shows two girls in traditional dress engaged in sorting through some ears of corn. The centre image, hidden behind the CD, is of a section of barbed wire fencing, and the third is of three men, again in traditional costume, using wooden poles to move a large log. These photographs would not look out of place in *Molvania*, which is richly illustrated with derisive pictures of Molvanian life: typically unattractive landscapes and people in outmoded dress. The shared bleakness that is present in both fictional countries can be observed in these pictures, which highlight the otherness of the Balkans in the eyes of the West.

However, there are definite differences between the images in *Molvania* and those in *Voi-La Intruder*, and this is in each case made clear by the accompanying context. We are expected to laugh at the unlikely tourist destination of Molvania, ridiculing its poor facilities and lack of development. While it may be insalubrious and lack the moral standards of the West, it is essentially an unthreatening, risible place. Hützovina, on the other hand, is not promoted as a tourist destination; it is more unknown than Molvania and, as a result, it seems more primitive and more dangerous. Yet it is not without a certain appeal; in fact, the unknown qualities and potentially hostile appearance of Hützovina make it the kind of place that might attract curious visitors. This is a thoroughly balkanist paradox – it is the perceived roughness of the Balkans that causes the region to be portrayed negatively, but held within this roughness is a definite romance, which is commuted by Gogol Bordello in their work and performance.

Although *Voi-La Intruder* introduces Hützovina, it should be remembered

that the first section of the album is entitled 'Songs of Immigration in Voi-La Minor'. It appears to chronicle a migration from Hützovina to the West, and its setting is therefore divided between the Balkans and the migrant's new home, presumably New York. Gogol Bordello's second album, *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, has a similarly dichotomous setting; while it is more obviously grounded in New York, Hützovina is reintroduced in a song called 'Occurrence on the Border (Hopping on a Pogo-Gypsy Stick)'. Hützovina and the Balkans are far more incidental in this album but this is nonetheless the only song of Gogol Bordello's that directly references this fictional country. By the time of this album's release in 2004, Gogol Bordello were more concerned with the assault on irony that they launched at the Whitney Museum. Even so, it is worth remembering that the performance they gave at the biennial was subtitled 'Occurrence on the Border'; evidently the Hützovina border had a continuing relevance. Moreover, the fact that the Balkans have long been perceived as a border between Europe and Asia is significant here. The 'Occurrence on the Border' described in the song is therefore both an incident that takes place on a national border, and an event that occurs within the Balkans. The song begins in this way:

Welcome to the Hützovina border
Come see what we got
Kontrabanda prana-donors ai
Never mind now Securitate it's a tihy chas
Latche Romenitza bravinta pjas!⁸³

The most obviously distinctive feature of these lyrics is their multilingualism; before the end of the first verse, three different languages can be heard. The song begins in English then segues into Ukrainian and from there into Romani. The song's narrative details an attempt to carry contraband substances (Kontrabanda)

⁸³ These are the full lyrics taken from the album sleeve – the lyrics section of Gogol Bordello's website omits the words 'Never mind now Securitate', which is in fact inaudible on the recording. Although this reference to the Romanian secret police is therefore not heard on record, it is worth noting here for its contribution to the impression of a cruel and hostile country. It should also be noted that the album sleeve is not necessarily more authoritative than the website, as it too omits some lyrics.

across the Hützovina border; since the border guards are sleeping (tihy chas) this is not difficult and the 'good Romani people' (lathe Romenitza) are able to celebrate with vodka (bravinta). The use of multiple languages has several implications. Firstly, the unknown nature of the Balkan setting is reinforced through the mixture of English and other languages. Secondly, the use of Romani means that Hützovina can be imagined to have a significant Romani population and the connotations of the Romani line in the first verse can be extended to the rest of the song, suggesting an oppressed people making the best of their situation. Here, we are reminded of the similar ways in which the Balkans and the Roma are perceived. It is also significant that there is a shift from English to Ukrainian and then to Romani; this occurs not only in the section quoted above, but in the song as a whole, which opens in English, includes Ukrainian lines scattered throughout and ends with several lines of Romani. As we have seen, perceptions of east and west are not always concrete in the Balkans and while the Roma, who can be found scattered all over Europe, are not the continent's most geographically eastern people, in terms of how they are perceived they are almost certainly the most eastern people in Europe. As such, the lyrics of 'Occurrence on the Border' undergo a gradual transition eastwards. This is not immediately noticeable: although three languages can be heard by the end of the first verse, to the untrained Western ear, Hütz might appear to sing in just two tongues – English and Balkan, or perhaps even English and Hützovinan.

In the second verse, the song's tone of hedonism in the face of austerity then modulates into the outright fantasy of, 'I'm catapulting psychotronics straight out my skull / Suddenly expression changes on the face of border guard.' Later still, these moods combine with:

Over the bridges and over the fence
Over the skyline and over powerplants
Hopping like a monkey on a holy toothpick
Is a rabbit on a pogo-gypsy stick

The border fence remains and bleak, industrial images are present in the

powerplants, but these are overcome by the fantastical as elements of magical realism are introduced. This device is used here to subvert the balkanism of the West. As we have observed throughout this analysis of *Voi-La Intruder*, Hützovina retains many of the usual traits of the Balkans as imagined in the West, such as the oppressive government, rural backwardness and lack of a geographically specific location. However, these are coated with the magical realism of a rabbit on a pogo stick; an element of the truly exotic is thus added to the dull and undefined landscape of balkanism. Hützovina breaks with balkanism in reclaiming the supposedly undesirable elements of the Balkans and putting them to use on its own terms. Alien cultures and risible elements are exaggerated to the point that they become fantastical and seem desirable: the primitive Balkan native with his foreign traditions is less open to derision when, superhero like, he is shooting psychotronics out of his skull, even if what a psychotronic actually is may not be made clear.⁸⁴ Similarly, oppressive landscapes and authority figures are subverted and overcome; border guards lose any power or fear that they command when they are caught sleeping on the job.

Hützovina thereby challenges balkanism, reclaiming those qualities of the Balkans that are seen as undesirable – the bleak landscapes and impassable borders – and putting them to use within a new set of parameters. The use of magical realism suggests that there is more to the Balkans than is imagined in the West, but that it is perhaps not understandable or even knowable to the Western observer. Hütz presents traces of a Balkans mythology, intimating that he has the full story but that he is denying it to outside onlookers. While Gypsy Punk does not operate directly in opposition to balkanism, it functions as an alternative means of portraying the Balkans. Since Gogol Bordello's work is located at a point between east and west, it is appropriate that it should put forward representations of the Balkans from both sides. As such, the balkanism of the West is tempered by a perspective from within the Balkans, and Gogol Bordello's audiences are invited to draw their own conclusions about the region.

Gogol Bordello might be regarded as producers of Balkan music: in fact

⁸⁴ According to the US Psychotronics Association, Psychotronics in fact refers to the science of mind-body-environment relationships. It is also a broad film genre that encompasses several alternative cinemas.

there is nothing Balkan about the band's personnel and their eclectically influenced songs have little in common with the music that of that region. In their use of the fictional country of Hützovina, they tie themselves more closely to the Balkans than they have any need to, but the function of Hützovina is not to provide a backdrop of stock associations for Gogol Bordello's music, but to draw attention to how incongruous these associations seem when they are placed in the context of the way the Balkans actually are. The practice of balkanism causes the Balkans to seem one-dimensional; the Balkans as they are seen in Gypsy Punk are far more multilayered and, in spite of the inclusion of fantastical elements, much closer to reality. Gogol Bordello's music is equally multilayered, drawing on sources from an array of locations and traditions. The Balkans might form only a small part of this musical melange, but the region gives rise to an extensive part of the band's mythology.

In the next chapter we will go on to consider this mythology in greater depth, and from there we will proceed to examining the way that Gypsy Punk functions less as a 'gypsy' or Balkan music and more as an immigrant music. Even in the manifestly Balkan landscape of Hützovina there are indications that Gogol Bordello are seeking to avoid falling too unambiguously into the classification of 'gypsy' or Balkan. The most visited part of Hützovina is its border, appearing in the songs 'Passport' and 'Occurrence on the Border (Hopping on a Pogo-Gypsy Stick)', and the country's perimeter is marked out prominently on the map that appears inside the album *Voi-La Intruder*. In addition, the first half of this album has the subtitle 'Songs of Immigration in Voi-La Minor'. The process of moving between countries is therefore a latent idea in Hützovina, and the figure of the immigrant, or at least the would-be immigrant, is important. This immigrant figure is in fact central to Gogol Bordello's work and mythology, as we will go on to see.

CHAPTER SIX:

Beyond music: the mythology and style of Gypsy Punk

A GYPSY PUNK MYTHOLOGY

During our examination of Gypsy Punk, we have seen that mythologised subjects are important to the genre: The Balkans have been perceived as hostile and primitive, while the Roma have been mythologized as a criminal class of nomads with a particular propensity towards musicianship. In addition, Gogol Bordello have introduced elements of their own mythology through the creation of their fictional country, Hützovina, and the elements of magical realism that are incorporated into it. However, there is more to the mythology of Gypsy Punk than just Hützovina and magical realism, and in this chapter I will examine the other components of this mythology. Gogol Bordello engage with a repertoire of cultural components that signify specific things for listeners. We have already examined what is understood by the words 'gypsy' and 'punk' and the ways in which Gogol Bordello use the associations that these terms have. However, it is the more distinct parts of the Gypsy Punk mythology that I will address in this chapter.

The name 'Gogol Bordello' provides a starting point here, since the very deliberate reference to the writer Nikolai Gogol contributes to the band's mythology. In 2002, Gogol Bordello described their style as 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret': while we have already considered 'gypsy' and 'punk', we have yet to examine cabaret and its influence on Gogol Bordello's performance style, and will do so here. The idea of the Gypsy Punk revolution, which has been widely disseminated but never explained by Hütz, will also be examined; comparing Gogol Bordello's management of revolution and mythology with the methods used by the Slovenian art collective Neue Slowenische Kunst will enable us to see how revolution is incorporated into the Gypsy Punk mythology. Style and iconography are further

important elements, and the influences on Gogol Bordello's visual presentation, such as Soviet culture and notions of wildness, will be considered. Moreover, we will address how the simultaneous use of numerous other myths – such as those associated with the Balkans and the Roma – results in a distinct Gypsy Punk mythology. Nothing in Gogol Bordello's work is distinctly Russian, Balkan or Romani: it is a composite. Elements of the mythology that is built around this composite can be found not only in Gogol Bordello's music, but also in posters and album artwork, and the style adopted by the band.

GOGOL MEETS BORDELLO

In the juxtaposition of 'Gogol' and 'Bordello', there is a clear mingling of literary heritage and sexual debauchery. The explicit reference to the Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol directly invokes Hütz's birthplace: one need not have heard Gogol Bordello's music or seen what the band looks like, but having heard only the name one can begin to form a judgement about their work. Hütz cites the Ukrainian elements in Gogol's work as being what makes him a relevant namesake for the band; he has said that he 'smuggled' Ukrainian culture into Russian literature in the same way that Gogol Bordello have added cultural elements from the home countries of each of the band's members to the American punk style that forms the foundations of their music.¹ Meanwhile, the choice of the word 'bordello' has its own connotations: although it is a familiar enough English word, its Italian associations bring a sense of cultural overlap. It is perhaps the non-English sound of the word that lend it more romanticised associations than, say, 'brothel' or 'whorehouse'²; while an element of sleaziness comes across, the sense of the exotic that it connotes means that it is a less negative-sounding word.

Gogol has his own exotic associations, in part derived from the Western discourse of balkanism. Although Ukraine is not part of the Balkans, the romanticism of Russia and its formerly Soviet neighbours that is also prevalent in the West is closely connected with the exoticism of the Balkans. Ukraine is neither

¹ Debbie Elliot: 'Gogol Bordello: Music from 'Gypsy Punks'', *NPR Studio Sessions*, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5371385>>

² Although the Italian word 'bordello' is in fact derived from the obsolete English word 'bordel'.

Balkan nor Russian, but it borders the Balkans and was part of the USSR until relatively recently. Consequently, in the way it is perceived in the West, it occupies an unclear cultural space; it is thought of as post-Soviet and East European, but there are also distinctly Russian elements to the way it is regarded. Nikolai Gogol straddles a similar line: while he is a Ukrainian writer, he was born into what was then the Russian Empire and he tends to be associated with authors like Pushkin and Dostoyevsky. The fact that he wrote in Russian rather than Ukrainian is also a factor but, as Hütz has pointed out, Gogol introduced elements from Ukrainian culture into his work.

Hütz reiterates this point in the introduction he wrote for a new edition of Gogol's novella *Taras Bulba* that was published in 2008. While *Taras Bulba* is less well known than many of Gogol's other works, such as his novel *Dead Souls* and stories like 'The Nose' and 'The Overcoat', it is appropriate that this text has its introduction penned by a Ukrainian, as it is among the most Ukrainian of Gogol's works, dealing with Ukrainian Cossacks. Hütz's introductory essay is a rather odd piece of writing, and it seems certain that he was commissioned not for his scholarly expertise, but due to the increasing renown of Gogol Bordello. His non-standard style of English does not appear to have been edited and the unorthodox syntax and grammar that is familiar from his lyrics can be observed at certain points. For example, he writes, 'Of course, sure, *inventually* Gogol went mad and starved himself to death in hope for some kind of religious cleansing. But does that mean he was ill in his previous times of *pura vida*?'³

Yet in spite of his occasional grammatical slips, his observation that Gogol 'took to the subversive work of smuggling Ukrainian melodism and syntax into the Russian language, giving it shades and tones never heard before'⁴ is certainly relevant (and may seem to defend Hütz's style of English) and reveals something about Gogol Bordello's cultural influences. Edyta M. Bojanowska has argued that in Gogol's work it is possible to find both Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms, and that he underwent a shift from being a Ukrainian writer to being a Russian one,

³ Eugene Hütz: 'Musicality of Freedom', introduction to Nikolai Gogol: *Taras Bulba* (San Francisco: Subculture Books, 2008), p.5.

⁴ Hütz, p.7.

which can be observed in his work.⁵ In fact, Gogol revised his original version of *Taras Bulba* so that it incorporated themes of Russian nationalism, in order to aid his career as a writer based in the Russian Empire; the revised 1842 text has remained the standard version as far as the edition introduced by Hütz. Writing about *Taras Bulba*, Bojanowska describes it as ‘his only fiction that glorifies Russian nationalism’, but also states that ‘Gogol’s Russian national costume is made of Ukrainian fabric: it is spun from the ethnocultural specificities and historic struggles of the Ukrainian Cossacks.’⁶ In Gogol Bordello’s music there is a comparable crossing of nationalisms: their style of Gypsy Punk, which takes a Western form, is a composite of musical styles from other regions of the globe, and the culture and political situation of the Romani people directly informs it.

But it is not only in his incorporation of one culture into another that Nikolai Gogol acts as an influence on Gogol Bordello. Gogol is well known for being a comic writer whose work often includes elements of the surreal. Perhaps the best instance of this is in his short story ‘The Nose’, in which the protagonist’s nose is detached from his face and takes on an autonomous existence. However, in some of his other works the surrealism is less outlandish: his novel *Dead Souls*, for example, features a protagonist who sets out to buy dead ‘souls’ from landowners in order to increase his own standing. Gogol Bordello have written songs that can be placed within each of these traditions. ‘Invisible Zedd’ is as bizarre and horrifying as ‘The Nose’; in this song an invisible man rapes and impregnates a woman who remains unaware of this even as she gives birth to an invisible child. On the other hand, the more satirical humour of *Dead Souls* informs songs such as ‘Passport’ and ‘Occurrence on the Border’, which we have already considered as comments on the Western view of the Balkans.

In his introduction to *Taras Bulba*, Hütz writes that Gogol ‘wrote in the spirit no other but punk rock, or beatnik prose, or any of the urgency driven arts.’⁷ This reads like a direct acknowledgement that Gogol is not only a namesake of, but also an influence on Gogol Bordello. In comparing the punk music in which his

⁵ Edyta M. Bojanowska: *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.5.

⁶ Bojanowska, p.255.

⁷ Hütz, p.6.

band is steeped with Gogol's style of writing, Hütz mythologises Gogol Bordello, giving it roots that go beyond music. But the mythology of Gypsy Punk is not simply something that can be dug up when the antecedents of the genre are examined; it is visible in numerous manifestations throughout Gogol Bordello's oeuvre, and it is the visual elements of the Gypsy Punk mythology that will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. We will begin with their live performance style, before moving on to the iconography that can be found in their album covers and other visual materials.

CABARET AND PERFORMANCE

We can observe in Gogol Bordello's work a kind of mythology that locates them not only in an imagined physical space, but also in a very particular cultural space that draws on Romani culture, balkanism and the discourses of migrants.⁸ This mythology can be detected in their songs, both musically and lyrically, as well as in the way that Hütz and his colleagues talk about their work and ethos. In addition, Gogol Bordello's live performances act as important channels for their mythology. Indeed, in the early stages of their activity, the performative aspect of their work seemed to be just as important as the songs that they were playing. At this time, they still referred to the style of music they played as 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret', which clearly has greater visual and performative connotations than the term 'Gypsy Punk'. In their manifesto from 2002 they state that they 'chose to work with Gypsy, Cabaret and punk traditions'; this indicates that the performative aspect of their work has been carefully contrived. Interestingly, the principally theatrical form of cabaret is listed before the musical form of punk: with the three forms listed in this way, and described as 'traditions', the implication is that of an artistic or cultural movement – perhaps the 'trans-global art syndicate family' described in the last sentence of the manifesto – rather than a band. In addition, the use of the term 'traditions' adds weight to the formation of a mythology; Gogol Bordello are working with forms that are firmly culturally entrenched and which provide strong foundations for mythological construction.

⁸ The latter will be examined in further detail in the following chapter.

While cabaret may contribute to the mythology of Gypsy Punk, it is important to remember that it has itself been the subject of mythologisation. Peter Jelavich begins his book on Berlin cabaret by pointing out that 'Every metropolis tends to generate an urban mythology and Berlin is no exception. One of the more enduring fables associated with that city is that it was a hotbed for cabaret.'⁹ Similarly, Lisa Appignanesi opens her overview of cabaret by listing its popular associations: strip clubs, cocktail bars and the 1972 film *Cabaret*.¹⁰ While we need neither examine nor debunk the mythology associated with cabaret here, it will be helpful to briefly consider the form before analysing the cabaret aspects of Gogol Bordello.

Cabaret first emerged in Paris in the late nineteenth century, as a form of entertainment that took place in intimate surroundings and typically consisted of short sketches, songs and dramatic pieces. The form soon spread throughout Europe, often undergoing evolutions as it adapted to different locations and cultural traditions. For example, it is important to distinguish between the cabaret of Paris and the Berlin cabaret, or *Kabarett*, which was more politically engaged and satirical in its tone; though it should be remembered that both forms were performed in Berlin. In the context of Gypsy Punk Cabaret, it is interesting to note that cabaret also reached Eastern Europe and Russia. Lawrence Senelick claims that 'Russia had a rich tradition of folk performance, but its experience of music hall and variety was exported from Western Europe and never seemed indigenous (indeed the words *myuzik-kholl* and *kafè shanton* reveal that).'¹¹ But this does not mean that Russian culture was not incorporated into its cabaret; Appignanesi describes how work by Chekhov, Turgenev and Pushkin was adapted for cabaret performance.¹²

The mythology of cabaret, which tends to be centred on Berlin, makes much of its associations with Bertolt Brecht. While the form may have had some influence on his work, Jelavich stresses that he was 'on the boundaries of

⁹ Peter Jelavich: *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.1.

¹⁰ Lisa Appignanesi: *The Cabaret* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p.1.

¹¹ Lawrence Senelick: *Cabaret Performance, Volume 1: Europe 1890-1920* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1989), p.144.

¹² Appignanesi, p.97.

cabaret'¹³. However, there is a precedent for using this mythological correlation in music: one band that has done so is The Dresden Dolls, who have sometimes been regarded as a Gypsy Punk band. Although their work, which consists of piano-based songs informed in equal parts by punk rock and music hall, sounds very different to Gogol Bordello's, the fact that they describe their sound as 'Brechtian Punk Cabaret', means that comparisons with 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret' are hardly surprising. Their lyrics are often witty or macabre, and their performances are theatrical; their movements on stage are exaggerated and deliberate, and bowler hats and stockings are their attire of choice. The Brechtian claims of The Dresden Dolls are questionable, but listening to their songs and looking at the costumes and make-up they wear, it is hard to refute their cabaret influence.

The cabaret element of Gogol Bordello is less obvious but, as was the case for their punk influences The Stooges and The Sex Pistols, many reviews of Gogol Bordello's shows have discussed the visual aspects as much as the music, and they have become known for putting on highly energetic and colourful live performances. While this performativity remains a feature of their live set, it was even more prominent earlier on in their career as a band. Steve Waksman has noted that early punk performance sought to 'make an impression without conveying a message'¹⁴, but while Gogol Bordello retained the raw energy of punk they also tempered it with narrative elements. Their shows in New York in the early 2000s were punctuated with often surreal theatrical sketches, typically involving Hütz undergoing some form of performed trauma. Images from these performances show him tied up in cables, burning himself with cigarettes and, in one instance, using himself as a human bowling ball and launching himself at a set of pins. There were other theatrics, such as an exploding briefcase and Hütz crowd-surfing atop a large drum, and elaborate costumes, including dancers dressed as aviators and nurses, and Hütz wearing a peacock's tail or a goat's head. At one 2002 gig, the rendition of 'Occurrence on the Border' was described by Ben Sisario as having begun:

¹³ Jelevich, p.2.

¹⁴ Steve Waksman: *This Ain't the Summer of Love* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), p.102.

with Mr. Hütz flanked by two young women – played by Pamela Racine and Susan Donaldson, members of what he calls the Gogol Dance Troop – dressed in mock Russian military uniforms. They took Mr. Hütz's passport, spread its pages out, beat him and tied him up. He stood singing with his hands behind his back, tied in microphone cables. The show left the theme and came back to it several times with nightmarish variations. The two women reappeared as weeping Russian beggars and as dancing ghost-dolls, as if from some unwritten underworld scene of "The Nutcracker." Throughout, Mr. Hütz beat himself on the head with a microphone and did a number of vaudevillian skits that all ended in violence.¹⁵

This spectacle can clearly be seen as the manifestation of the band's artistic statement, which places as much emphasis on theatre as it does on music. Moreover, the reviewer seems to view the performance as a piece of theatre as much as a concert: he says that the two young women who tie up Hütz are 'played' by Racine and Donaldson. This act is therefore not performed by the dancers themselves, but by characters whom they are portraying. Interestingly, in this account of the performance, Hütz is not described as playing any part; he is presented as though he appears on stage as himself rather than as an actor. But when the details of the sketch – such as the military uniforms and passport confiscation – are considered, then the episode seems to function as an enactment of the stories about the Hützovina border. It is as though Hütz is taking on the role of the Voi-La Intruder character, approaching the border in the song 'Passport' and being accosted by guards. It therefore seems slightly incongruous that the song being played during Hütz's performed arrest was the magical realist ballad of smuggling and psychotronics, 'Occurrence on the Border'. Significantly, the magical resolution that the song's lyrics describe is not acted out on stage; we are only shown its bleaker, more oppressive content. Even when fantastical costumes are put on, the end result is invariably violent.

¹⁵ Ben Sisario: 'Gypsy Punk Cabaret: A Multinational', *New York Times*, 14 April 2002, p.25.

Sisario does not connect this performance with Hützovina or the Balkans, despite the fact that 'Occurrence on the Border' begins with the line 'Welcome to the Hützovina border'. He focuses his attention on the performance rather than the music and chooses to present Gogol Bordello as being more Russian than Balkan. In a way, this is accurate: although none of the band's members are from Balkan countries, the lineup does include two Russians and a Ukrainian. Yet there is nothing in any of Gogol Bordello's early performances that is exclusively Russian. The military uniforms and beggars employed in the 'Occurrence on the Border' sketch are described as Russian by Sisario, not by Gogol Bordello. Similarly, the comparison with dolls in Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* could just as easily have alluded to Delibes' ballet *Coppelia*.¹⁶ There are, equally, no directly Balkan references in the performance; these are confined to the music. But evidently, Sisario has identified Gogol Bordello with Russia based on his immediate impressions of the band, and his reading of their performance is informed by this perception. This reminds us that Western perceptions of 'Eastern' locations are to an extent interchangeable. Although the cultures of Russia and the Balkans are very different, and although there are many distinct cultures within each of these spaces, they are thought of as similar by many Western onlookers. Gogol Bordello's theatre is not directly derived exclusively from any one source, but is a composite that delivers only a vague sense of place. This reflects the nature of Hützovina, a fictional country that is both of the Balkans and outside of it.

It is certainly possible to find elements of cabaret in Gogol Bordello's early performance; if we consider the main characteristics of cabaret we find that many of these can be applied to it. Their early shows took place in an intimate space that permitted engagement between performers and audience. Their content was a combination of music, theatre and surreal comedy. The whole event was presided over by the MC figure of Hütz, who acted as ringmaster as much as lead singer. And there is clear satire in the violent treatment that Hütz is subjected to in the sketch Sisario recounts; this performance functions in the same way as the lyrics of 'Occurrence on the Border.' The satire here has two subjects: on one hand, oppressive states and regimes; and on the other, the Western view that such

¹⁶ It bears mentioning that *The Nutcracker* is not completely Russian, since it is adapted from a novel by the German writer E.T.A. Hoffman.

regimes are typically found in the Balkans or the former USSR. This is the same kind of dual satire that we saw in *Molvania*. The fact that there is no specific sense of place in Gogol Bordello's cabaret suggests that they are engaging with events that take place on a global scale. Although Hützovina is clearly Balkan in its construction, it is used here to represent any place where oppression exists. When we consider Gogol Bordello's interest in Romani issues, the global setting of their performance becomes more significant; for Romani people, such oppression and ill-treatment occurs wherever they are in the world.

Gogol Bordello's gigs are still frequently described in terms of their visual aspects, but they have undergone a stylistic shift. Although their sets remain highly visual, their theatricality no longer entails such sketches as the one described above, which contains an actual narrative arc. The cabaret element has been retracted in favour of the music, which is now clearly the primary concern. Indeed, the musical influences of Gogol Bordello have broadened to include reggae and Latin American music, and in this respect the 'mind-stretching combinations' that the artistic statement advocates drawing from the world's cultures are evidently in full swing. However, the stage presence of Gogol Bordello is now very much that of a band rather than the art syndicate that they presented themselves as in their manifesto. This was certainly the case by 2006, when I first began to attend their shows. At their London gig at the Brixton Academy in November of that year, the focus was very much on the music. At this time the setlist consisted largely of tracks from the 2005 album *Gypsy Punks*: therefore the majority of the material was comprised of songs about the immigrant experience, rather than Gogol Bordello's earlier narrative songs, which lend themselves well to being not just performed, but acted out. However, despite the absence of the dark sketches that were integral to their earlier shows, the performance was certainly not without its colour and sense of performance. This was in part derived from the appearance of the band: Hütz was dressed in an embroidered shirt and garish yellow and black striped trousers, while the backing singers made their first appearance on the stage wearing black masks, and played with drumsticks on brightly painted washboards.

The change in performance style from Gogol Bordello's early days in New

York may result from their growing popularity. In a venue the size of the Brixton Academy, which can hold 5000 people, the sketches described above would have been far less dramatic than they were on a small scale, particularly for those towards the back of the auditorium. It has therefore been necessary for the performance to evolve in order to engage with concertgoers, and the most striking thing about this performance was the manner in which Gogol Bordello, and in particular Hütz, broke down the barrier between band and audience. Their performance style is highly dynamic; the musicians continually move around much of the area of the stage. Most of them spend large portions of time at the very front of the stage, as close to the audience as possible. Hütz frequently descends from the stage and, when there is a barrier separating audience from stage, he leans over this and sings into the crowd. However, the most dramatic piece of engagement with the audience was the drum surfing that Hütz continued to regularly incorporate into Gogol Bordello's performance at this time. In most cases, as at the Brixton show in 2006, it takes place as part of the extended rendition of 'Baro Foro' played during the encore. The large bass drum played by Pamela Racine was lifted down into the hands of the audience. Hütz then climbed from the stage, crossed the barrier that separated him from the crowd and mounted the drum. Initially he crouched on the drum but, having gained his balance, stood upright on top of it as the audience continued to support it. Then, in an elaboration of the punk-inspired drum surfing we discussed in Chapter Three, he brought his microphone from the stage and continued to sing from this position, also using the microphone to beat the drum.

With typically eight musicians on stage at a time, all of them moving around one another and having to negotiate microphone stands and the cables that connect their instruments to amplifiers, the performance needs to be tautly choreographed. At some points, this is made highly apparent. For example, during the finale of Baro Foro, the whole band moves en masse, first to one of the front corners of the stage, then to the other. More often, however, there is a definite feeling of spontaneity; when Hütz climbs a speaker stack, or leans into the crowd it seems unlikely that this has been rehearsed or planned. Indeed, it is the fact that Gogol Bordello are not a static band that is most immediately striking about their

performance style. Each musician has a predefined space in which they stand when they first come onstage, and they generally return to these spots at the start of each song; but they continually move around, making full use of the whole area of the stage, and sharing each other's microphones.

This dynamic element has continued to be an integral part of Gogol Bordello's shows. However, over time they have become more disciplined performers; their playing is increasingly tight, and each movement seems slightly less spontaneous each time they tour. This is perhaps inevitable: the longer they have performed together, the more polished they have become as a band, and it is reasonable to expect that they will continue to use techniques that work rather than improvising in the way that they did at their early shows. Even so, I should point out that I attended four of the gigs Gogol Bordello played on their European tour in the winter of 2010 and that, as well as some variation between setlists, renditions of certain songs differed slightly between gigs, indicating that the band continues to experiment during their performances. At the show at Liverpool Academy in November 2010, for example, the opening lines of 'Start Wearing Purple' were sung in turn by several of the band's members, each using their own first language. This was not reprised at any of the other UK shows that tour. Sometimes the location of the show informs the performance: at their Prague show in June 2011, Gogol Bordello performed a cover of the song 'Pověste Ho Vejš' by the Czech musician Michal Tučný, while the Italian-language song 'Santa Marinella' is more likely to get an outing in Italy.

As such, the sense of a unity existing between people of different nationalities, which Gogol Bordello seem to promote in the content of their songs, also comes across in their concerts; in the case of their Prague concert they consciously aligned themselves with their audience by singing a Czech song. However, a sense of unity is apparent even when they are not engaging with audiences of specific nationalities. This is partly due to the number of musicians in Gogol Bordello, which is larger than in most bands; in addition, their vivacity in performance emphasises the number of people on stage. They also frequently collaborate with other musicians, particularly those they tour with. At the 2010 show in London, for example, support acts Alain Johannes and DeVotchKa came

onstage during Gogol Bordello's set to perform 'Mishto' and a cover of Johnny Cash's 'Ghost Riders in the Sky'. The fact that Gogol Bordello now occasionally cover others artist on stage also reflects the change in their performance style from their cabaret-influenced shows in New York to their international tours. Clearly, they are no longer using theatre to reflect the immigrant experience; instead, the music is dominant and the performative aspects feel supplementary. But this does not necessarily mean that the original multiform intent of Gypsy Punk has been superseded by musical development: it retains a presence in other aspects of Gogol Bordello's work. The more performative elements that once manifested themselves in moments of cabaret also come through in the style and iconography that the band have adopted, as we will go on to see. However, before moving on to these areas of the Gypsy Punk mythology, it is necessary to consider the function of this mythology and the way that it is constructed.

THE MYTH OF REVOLUTION

In Chapter Four we considered the idea of the Gypsy Punk revolution and what Gogol Bordello mean by it, and established that they are seeking to define a new set of values against which culture and music can be measured in a multicultural age. Although we have already addressed the objectives of this revolution, the fact of the revolution is in itself as important as its objectives and, as such, the Gypsy Punk revolution can be considered to be one of the central elements of Gogol Bordello's mythology. Yet Roland Barthes has contrasted myth with political language, stating that whereas 'the function of myth is to empty reality'¹⁷, the function of political language is to transform it,¹⁸ and concluding that 'revolutionary language proper cannot be mythical'.¹⁹ This would seem to conflict with the idea of the Gypsy Punk revolution as myth but, as we will see, Gogol Bordello use mythology in a distinctive way that binds it to their talk of revolution. Indeed, the conflict may be resolved if we consider the Gypsy Punk revolution as being a part of Gogol Bordello's mythology.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes: *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2000), p.143.

¹⁸ Barthes, p.146.

¹⁹ Barthes, p.146.

Barthes made his statement in the essay 'Myth Today', which serves as a theoretical appendix to his collection of essays *Mythologies*. In this essay, he defines myth through semiology, describing it as 'a second-order semiological system'²⁰ and a 'metalanguage'²¹. Drawing on Saussure's concepts of the signifier and the signified, which together form a sign, he adds a second layer to this notion.²² Whereas Saussure's foundation deals with the construction of language, Barthes engages in his additional layer with the formation of myth. Saussure's signifier, in linguistics a word, and his signified, the concept that that word denotes, come together to form the sign, which Barthes describes as a 'concrete entity'²³. In the mythological second layer, the sign becomes a signifier, and combines with a new signified, resulting in another sign. This second layer is what Barthes defines as myth.

But, as we have seen in the case of Hützovina, Gogol Bordello appear to transform reality into something mythical: their Gypsy Punk revolution is therefore both a quasi-political gesture and an act of myth-making. Their mythology is clearly informed by other myths: we have already addressed those myths associated with the figure of the 'gypsy', the Balkans, and cabaret, and each of these can be thought of as being mythical in the sense used by Barthes. For example, the sign 'Balkan', a combination of the word 'Balkan' and the geographical area that it represents, can be combined with the multiple signifieds that we have examined previously, for example, the notion of a war-torn region and the legacy of communist rule. This results in a new sign, and it is here that we find that myth of the Balkans. Similarly, the myth of the 'gypsy' is formed through a combination of the sign 'gypsy' and signifieds, such as criminality, magic and fortune telling.

Gogol Bordello use and adapt these myths, and so we might deduce that they use the myth of revolution in the same way. A comparable interplay between mythology and revolution can be found in the work of the Slovenian art collective NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst), who are an interesting counterpart to Gogol Bordello. NSK has produced work in the fields of music, theatre and visual art, and

²⁰ Barthes, p.114.

²¹ Barthes, p.115.

²² See F de Saussure: *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983).

²³ Barthes, p.113.

incorporates the band Laibach and visual art collective IRWIN, amongst other artistic groups. Like Gogol Bordello, NSK have a fictional homeland; however, this is realised in a very different way to Hützovina. The NSK State in Time was founded in 1992 and although it is without a fixed location it claims to function as a country, issuing passports and opening embassies and consulates. One of their members even claims to have entered the UK using an NSK passport.²⁴ Their political engagement is stronger than Gogol Bordello's, but it is also far more ambiguous. They have been perceived as both Stalinist and fascist; in fact they oppose authoritarianism of any kind. But in order to set up their opposition, they adopt the style of their antagonists. Laibach's music is influenced by military music, and they often dress in a manner that is reminiscent of the SS. Their use of the German language rather than their native Slovenian – Neue Slowenische Kunst translates as New Slovenian Art, and Laibach is the German name for Ljubljana – has led to accusations of neo-Nazism; in fact they chose the name 'Laibach' because it was banned in the Slovenia in the years following World War II, and then again for a period in the 1980s after they began to use the name.²⁵

Slavoj Žižek has addressed their ambiguity, pointing out that Laibach might on initial inspection be regarded as ironically aping totalitarianism, but that the similarity between them and the objects of their satire is so close that they almost seem to identify with totalitarianism. He goes on to question whether their satire might be misinterpreted by their audiences, noting that 'This uneasy feeling is fed on the assumption that ironic distance is automatically a subversive attitude.'²⁶ However, Žižek then goes on to ask:

What if, on the contrary, the dominant attitude of the contemporary "postideological" universe is precisely the cynical distance toward public values? What if this distance, far from posing any threat to the system, designates the supreme form of conformism, since the normal function of the system requires cynical distance? In this

²⁴ Richard Wolfson: 'Warriors of Weirdness', *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 2003, p.25.

²⁵ Wolfson, p.25.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek: 'Why are Laibach and the NSK not Fascists?', Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl: *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), p.287.

sense the strategy of Laibach appears in a new light: it "frustrates" the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it – by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of the system, over-identification suspends its efficiency.²⁷

In short, Laibach produce a myth that imitates the political language they seek to subvert, and carry out their subversion in this way. This is not the same as Gogol Bordello's use of mythologised revolution: whereas Gogol Bordello create their mythology out of extant myths, Laibach's mythology is based on political language. While Laibach's sources are radical politics, Gogol Bordello's are mythologised perceptions of certain peoples and places. Laibach appear in the guise of the systems they oppose; Gogol Bordello represent, in their performances and songs, a composite of myths. Barthes has written that myth distorts²⁸, and we have seen this to be true in the cases of the Roma and the Balkans. In describing themselves as Gypsy Punk, Gogol Bordello adopt the image of some of the most misrepresented people in the world, and foreground the Romani element of their influences and origins. They use the myth of 'gypsiness', and simultaneously identify with this myth and correct it.

Above and beyond the myths that they propagate about the origins of Hützovina and the Mehanata club in New York, their ultimate mythology is the myth that they are a Roma, or a Balkan band: in fact they are neither, though they draw on Balkan and Roma traditions and myths. Indeed, their 2002 manifesto does not mention any affiliations with the Balkans or the music and culture of that region; while the 'gypsy' tradition that Gogol Bordello profess to draw on is mentioned only in passing, and said to be used out of familiarity, rather than due to a desire to make any particular cultural or political point. The use of Romani influences in their work certainly does make many cultural and political points, but this goes unmentioned in the manifesto. This is important in terms of Gogol Bordello's stance on authenticity: they do not want to seem influenced by gypsy music but wish to appear as though they are 'gypsies' themselves.

²⁷ Žižek, p.287.

²⁸ Barthes, p.121.

Being 'gypsy' is not their only concern however; they are also 'punk', and are therefore informed by the mythology of punk. This became the subject of critical enquiry immediately after punk's initial emergence; Dick Hebdige's 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* is a prominent early example. Hebdige uses punk as his primary case study of subculture and employs Barthes' work on myth, along with Stuart Hall's conception of hegemony to construct his argument. He writes that hegemonies contain and control subordinate groups 'within an ideological space which does not seem at all "ideological": which appears instead to be permanent and 'natural', to lie outside history, to be beyond particular interests'²⁹. The composition of such space is also apparent in Žižek's point about NSK: Laibach draw attention to the ideological nature of the space by adopting the appearance of the constructors of that space. Laibach are also relevant to Hebdige's own agenda, which is a concern with style. His argument is that the construction of a style 'signals a Refusal'³⁰; that is to say that subculture's challenge to hegemony is conducted through style. Hebdige's example is the use of the swastika by punks. He points out that in this appropriation, the swastika 'lost its "natural" meaning – fascism'³¹, and was used simply to shock. Laibach's use of authoritarian style is more sophisticated. Their 'Refusal', which is enacted through their outward appearance, is to shun the ironic distance that they are expected to maintain between themselves and the hegemony.

If we are to bring Gogol Bordello into this discourse of 'Refusal', then we must first ask what kind of hegemony they are seeking to subvert. Having considered the points set out in their manifesto, it would seem that they set out to oppose a cultural hegemony in which a homogenising form of globalisation is at work worldwide, and in which the remaining elements of cultural diversity, which may be regarded as authentic, are reduced to stereotypes. Such elements have in fact been not only stereotyped, but also mythologised: following on from Barthes, Hebdige states that "mythology" performs its vital function of naturalization and normalization'³². This is how the Roma and the Balkans have become

²⁹ Dick Hebdige: *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.16.

³⁰ Hebdige, p.3.

³¹ Hebdige, p.116.

³² Hebdige, p.6.

mythologised: their mythical representations have come to be regarded as their 'natural' or 'normal' states of being. As we have seen, Gogol Bordello both identify with and subvert these myths. The 'Refusal' of a subculture like Gypsy Punk acts as an interruption to myth; like Laibach, Gogol Bordello are particularly interesting because they interrupt the myths that already exist with a new mythology of their own.

GYPSY PUNK STYLE

In the song '60 Revolutions' Hütz rails against the 'posers and models with guitars' who 'boogie to the shit for hits'.³³ The suggestion here is that it is no longer feasible to challenge hegemony through style, because the influx of bands with carefully constructed images that draw on established subcultures has drained the authenticity of Hebdige's 'Refusal'. This may not be the case for Laibach, who are operating from a country that has within the last century been subject to both extremes of the political spectrum: they use a radical style to address more radical ideologies. But in the historically more moderate United States, an authentic 'Refusal' may no longer be possible through the means of style. It is therefore necessary to examine in depth the style of Gogol Bordello and the function that it serves. The influence of Soviet society is also important here, as we shall see.

Hütz's comment about 'posers and models with guitars' is a good example of Gogol Bordello's self-presentation as ardent advocates of substance over style. But, as Hebdige has demonstrated, style is highly significant in subculture, and since Gypsy Punk functions as a subculture, its style demands examination. Hebdige used punk as his main example, but its stylistic aspects, such as ripped clothing and spiked hairstyles, which once expressed defiance, have now been fully assimilated into mainstream culture. Julia Emberley has written of the 'cooptation and colonization of punk-style by the fashion apparatus as a style that has come to signify a subversive and sub-cultural way of life on the urban front'³⁴, suggesting that subversion through style may no longer be possible. Accordingly, artists

³³ This reference to 'models with guitars' may well be another swipe at The Strokes.

³⁴ Julia Emberley: 'The Fashion Apparatus and the Deconstruction of Postmodern Subjectivity', *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Theory*, Vol. XI, Nos. 1-2 (1987), p.49.

working in the punk tradition more recently have rejected the traditional methods of 'Refusal' and some have begun to embrace uniformity instead. Swedish band The Hives perform in matching suits and restrict their colour palette to black and white; and having announced their political engagement with their 2004 album *American Idiot*, Green Day adopted a similar style. This is not an exclusively contemporary trend, but an alternative form of 'Refusal' that was started by New Wave musicians almost as soon as the initial popularity of punk was beginning to wane: The Jam performed wearing suits while punk was at its peak, and the sleeve of Blondie's 1978 album *Parallel Lines* displays a similarly monochrome uniformity. Here, we see punk appropriating the fashions of mainstream culture, leaving behind the ironic distance of safety pins and outlandish hairstyles.

Gypsy Punk follows neither the original punk 'Refusal', nor the subsequent reclamation of uniformity. Although Gogol Bordello's lineup has included backing singers and dancers who normally performed in matching outfits, each of the other band members maintains their own distinct style. But while the appearance of the band as a whole is important in itself, it is Hütz who is literally centre stage, and therefore to whom analysis should be primarily devoted. In spite of his hostility towards 'models with guitars', Hütz himself spent some time working as a model before forming Gogol Bordello. He has admitted that fashion is important to him, though he asserts that 'the modelling world is boring and full of brainless people'³⁵. He is, however, proud of the skill at using a sewing machine he learned from his grandmother, a tailor, and says, 'I suppose I've always been a bit of a fashion designer on the side, and I do all the Gogol Bordello outfits and merchandising.'³⁶ Growing up in Soviet Ukraine, Hütz became interested in Western punk music, and while it was possible to buy bootlegged tapes, it was harder to emulate the fashion choices of punk:

My grandmother always said that you could pull anyone's pants down in my country and know what will be there, irrespective of

³⁵ Stephanie Smith: 'It's a Man's World: Eugene Hütz of Gogol Bordello', *Daily Mail Online* <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1018736/Its-mans-world-Eugene-Hutz-Gogol-Bordello.html>>

³⁶ Smith: 'It's a Man's World'.

creed or sex: black boxer shorts. Such were the economics of the Soviet Union that there were only so many fabrics being produced and the variety of stuff was pretty low.³⁷

Indeed, Hütz's adolescence in the USSR has undoubtedly informed his attitude towards style as resistance. Andrew Wilson and Nina Bachkatov wrote during the period of glasnost that 'The needs of the very young are well taken care of. Where [the system] breaks down is at the onset of adolescence, when the young person looks for a way of escape, discovers vastly different needs, and develops faster than the capacity of the system to cope.'³⁸ The inadequacy of the leisure facilities provided for this group meant that 'in the end the needs of the young could be met only by a Western import: and so the word 'disco' entered the Russian vocabulary.'³⁹ But while the Western word 'disco' was introduced, the Western conception of this institution was adapted into something far more sterile:

Generally they consist of large, lugubrious, perfunctorily decorated halls, in which, as in all public places, smoking is forbidden, no alcohol is served, and waitresses have all the charm of the imperious *babushkas* to be found in any Soviet factory canteen. The music blares out at full volume, but the selection strikes young Western visitors as poor and old-fashioned. No chance of letting one's hair down or ruining one's health in nights of abandonment. At 10.45 the disc-jockey announces the last dance – and, as with cafés and restaurants, doors close at 11pm.⁴⁰

The alternative to this was bootlegged tapes or, as we have learned from the case of Hütz, illicit radio broadcasts. Bootlegs were not exclusively imported from the West: there were native Russian rock bands, but their work was highly restricted. The state operated record label Melodiya was the only official provider of recorded

³⁷ Charlotte Philby: 'How do I look?: Eugene Hütz', *The Independent*, 8 December 2007, Magazine p.11.

³⁸ Andrew Wilson and Nina Bachkatov: *Living with Glasnost* (London: Penguin, 1988), p.127.

³⁹ Wilson and Bachkatov, p.139.

⁴⁰ Wilson and Bachkatov, p.140.

music, and this did not aim to cater to popular preference.⁴¹ Boris Schwarz has drawn attention to position of popular music in Soviet Russia, remarking, 'One can imagine the uproar on both sides of the Atlantic if a committee of "classical" musicians attempted to decide whether The Beatles or *Hair* were "aesthetically good" for the people.'⁴² Essentially, until the late 1980s it was very difficult to listen freely to any music other than that which was officially sanctioned by the government – music which was not to the taste of Hütz and many of his contemporaries. And although censorship was softened greatly in the era of Gorbachev, the genre that continued to provoke the most hostility was Hütz's beloved punk. Additionally, as Romana Bahry has pointed out, the waves of glasnost spread only gradually, and in Ukraine censorship was far more strict, resulting in an exodus of many Ukrainian musicians to more liberal Russian cities.⁴³

The combination of censorship and limited fashion choices means that in order to enact the stylistic 'Refusal' of punk, it was necessary to customise or make one's own clothes. This is very much in keeping with punk's DIY ethos; while in the West it quickly became possible to buy brand new clothes that were made to resemble cut up and customised punk garments, under Soviet rule, anyone who wanted to emulate that style had to carry out their own adaptations. As such, Hütz is closer to the idea of style as resistance than many of his generation in the West. Dressing in opposition to the majority was not just reacting against the hegemony of the Soviet environment; here, it was far more difficult to signal a 'Refusal', partly because the repercussions would be much more severe, and partly because the means to do so could not be obtained as easily.

In the case of Gypsy Punk style we might expect the stylistic choices typical of punk to appear in conjunction with Roma-derived fashion, but in considering the styles and function of Romani dress we should remain aware of the stereotyped 'gypsy' and the stylistic expectations that onlookers from the West might have of this figure, and ensure that we differentiate between stereotype and

⁴¹ See Pekka Gronow: 'Ethnic Music and Soviet Record Industry', *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Jan. 1975), p.93.

⁴² Boris Schwarz: *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), p.491.

⁴³ Romana Bahry: 'Rock Culture and Rock Music in Ukraine', Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.): *Rocking the State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p.244.

reality. Only if a distinction is made between the two will be possible to consider how Gogol Bordello negotiate the two styles. Ethnographic studies provide a good starting point for examining how Romani people dress, though it is important to bear in mind that there will be significant variation between different Roma communities. There are some clear similarities, however, particularly in the functions of male and female dress. From Michael Stewart's fieldwork in Hungary we can surmise that the main function of female dress is to preserve modesty; a headscarf is worn, along with an apron, which is worn 'because of the shame of menstruation'⁴⁴. Stewart notes that 'All women's aprons, scarves, and often, dresses sported flowery patterns'⁴⁵, and attaches associations of femininity to these. For men, the emphasis is on display and status, and Stewart's male subjects typically wear smart or formal attire. This is more pronounced than usual when they go to the market to do business:

Šošoj was dressed in his smart, circa 1940s militia leather coat; his brother-in-law Zelev, in a suit; and the two older men, in polished leather boots, breeches and checked jackets cut in the "English" style. Each of the men had newly combed and twirled his bushy mustache and wore a hat to suit his style.⁴⁶

Paloma Gay y Blasco's ethnography of Gitanos in Madrid reveals that similarities can be identified between styles of Romani dress in very different locations. The young men that she studies in Spain are as concerned with dressing smartly, as with the Hungarians in Stewart's study: 'Most of them take great care of their looks, wearing expensive-looking clothes and shiny shoes and jewellery, and tying colourful scarves around their necks. They make their mothers or sisters iron their shirts and trousers carefully.'⁴⁷ Women in Madrid are described as dressing, like the men, for display, although they maintain the parameters of modesty

⁴⁴ Michael Stewart: *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p.214.

⁴⁵ Stewart, p.213.

⁴⁶ Stewart, p.147.

⁴⁷ Paloma Gay y Blasco: *Gypsies in Madrid: Sex, Gender and the Performance of Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p.77.

expected of them.⁴⁸ It is in this practice of dressing for display that we find the origins of the stereotypical 'gypsy' style that is frequently invoked in Western fashion. 'Gypsy' style fashion typically involves long skirts, bright colours, and lots of jewellery. While elements of this style are evident in the ethnographies considered here, concessions to modesty such as aprons and scarves, which are an important part of Romani culture, are absent. Carol Silverman describes how American audiences at 'gypsy' music concerts have dressed 'in their idea of Gypsy clothing. Some men looked like Johnny Depp in the film *Chocolat*, and some women had colorful skirts, shawls and gold earrings. This points to the American tendency to participate in Gypsy music, not only to patronize it.'⁴⁹ The appropriation of 'gypsy' fashion can be seen almost as a microcosm of the appropriation of wider 'gypsy' culture: only the elements perceived as desirable are used, and this means that an accurate representation of Romani culture is not conveyed.

Hütz's style appears in some ways to be a product of this pattern of appropriation. He often wears the bright colours and flamboyant styles associated with 'gypsy' stereotypes. Although he has never professed to dressing in a 'gypsy' fashion, as the singer in a Gypsy Punk band, his dress is certainly open to scrutiny regarding the appropriation of Romani culture. As Hütz has become a more recognisable public figure, his manner of dress has been examined and remarked upon frequently; this reached its apex when Gucci's creative director Frida Giannini widely publicised the fact that he was the inspiration for the label's fall 2008 collection. 'The New York band Gogol Bordello and its lead singer Eugene Hütz typify the Gucci man'⁵⁰, she said in one interview. She described her collections as, 'bohemian and decadent, but still possessing a nonchalant attitude that makes them modern and sexy. There was the rock and roll in previous collections, but I wanted to explore other sides, [like] bold fabrics, workmanship, and opulent ornaments'.⁵¹ Her use of the word 'bohemian' is interesting, due to its connotations of Eastern Europe and the figure of the 'gypsy'. More significant still

⁴⁸ Gay y Blasco, p.80.

⁴⁹ Carol Silverman: *Romani Routes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.263.

⁵⁰ Derek Blasberg: 'The Real Thing', *V Magazine*, No. 54 (Fall 2008), p.91.

⁵¹ Blasberg, p.91.

is the fact that this term is placed in opposition to 'modern and sexy'; this reveals a balkanist attitude and a reluctance to reconcile modern fashion with locations outside of the West. One report on Giannini's collection takes a similar standpoint, but attaches a different sense of place:

The Gucci collection presented Monday evening is laden with details gleaned from Russian folklore — from richly embroidered silk shirts to oversized fur outerwear. Models with tussled hair walked the carpeted runway in super soft leather riding boots, carrying a large bag, a gilded chain belt marking the waist of the tapered trousers, a colorful shawl tossed across the shoulder. Military jackets with brass buttons and velvet collars — White Russian in exile style — abound. For nighttime, the Gucci man flaunts a silk shirt with ruffled front and a heavily decorated velvet jacket with traditional standup collar.⁵²

In the same way that Ben Sisario saw Russian influences in Gogol Bordello's performance of 'Occurrence on the Border', this reporter compares Giannini's Hütz-inspired clothes with traditional Russian dress. However, one can also imagine the outfits described in this report featuring in the guidebook to the fictional Balkan state of Molvania, so kitsch and faux-ethnic do they sound. Once again, we are reminded of the analogousness of Eastern locations as perceived from the West. Some of the garments mentioned are in fact almost identical to those often sported by Hütz: striped trousers, coin-belts, brightly coloured scarves and decorated velvet jackets are all staples of his wardrobe. Evidently Giannini has not just dropped the name of Gogol Bordello as a way of promoting her collection; Hütz does indeed seem to have acted as a muse. This is discernible from the ambiguity of influence in the collection; it is not specifically Russian, nor is it Balkan or Roma, but it is informed by perceptions of all of these. Hütz appears to have acted for Giannini as a figure who embodies this confusion of cultures, and this prompts us to question whether Hütz is aiming to achieve a similar effect in

⁵² Associated Press: 'Plain vs. showy highlight Milan runway shows', *MSN Today*
<<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22707795/>>

the construction of his own style. The manner in which he dresses has become a definite part of the Gypsy Punk mythology, which, as we have seen, draws on mythologies associated with the Balkans and with 'gypsiness'.

More prominent still in the mythology of Gypsy Punk is his most obvious distinguishing feature – his trademark moustache, which has been referenced so often in articles about Gogol Bordello, and remarked upon so frequently in interviews with Hütz, that it has become almost synonymous with Gogol Bordello. Predictably, it has been imitated by fans of the band, with some male fans growing their own handlebar moustaches, and fans of both sexes sometimes attending gigs wearing painted-on examples. Hütz contributes to the mythologisation of his facial hair by being frequently quoted as saying, 'A man without a moustache is like a woman with one'. He qualifies this in one interview by revealing that 'I tell people that's an old Ukrainian saying, but actually I'm Ukrainian and I said it, so it's partly true. My moustache isn't a fashion statement; it's just part of me.'⁵³ The false maxim is also contradicted in another interview, in which Hütz talks about being approached by Madonna, who offered him a role in her poorly-received filmmaking debut *Filth and Wisdom*: 'One of the first things she said asked me is how do I feel dressing up as a woman? And I said, 'As long as it's a woman with moustache, I have no problem'⁵⁴.⁵⁵ Hütz is often described as making the moustache cool, and as being an influence in its resurgence as a fashionable form of facial hair.

Not only does the moustache have strong associations with Gogol Bordello, but it has also become a symbol of the wider movement of Gypsy Punk, and even beyond this, with the more traditional Balkan music that has been co-opted into the subculture. This plays on the stereotype of the moustachioed 'gypsy', which is perceived as being confirmed by the fact that Hütz has a moustache. There is also a history of associating moustaches with the Balkans: this can be seen in the example of the Balkan dictator Kurvi-Tasch in the Tintin comic *The Calculus Affair*,

⁵³ Smith: 'It's a Man's World'.

⁵⁴ Of course, Hütz did shave off his moustache for the role of Alex in *Everything is Illuminated*: whether he was more willing to compromise for his first film role, or whether the moustachioed woman was in fact crucial to Madonna's vision, is unclear.

⁵⁵ Alex Molotkow: 'Gogol Bordello Motley Crew', *Exclaim.ca*, July 2007
<<http://exclaim.ca/articles/coverstory.aspx?csid1=112>>

and in the writings of Edith Durham, who travelled extensively in the Balkans in the early twentieth century, and who wrote that:

To be without a moustache, both in Montenegro and Albania, is held to be peculiarly disgraceful. The wicked man of Albanian fairy stories is a *chosé* (a hairless man). When I mentioned in Montenegro, that my brother was clean shaven, I was told not to repeat such disgraceful facts about him.⁵⁶

As a result of these longstanding associations, and Hütz's facial hair, the moustache has been adopted as an unofficial logo of Gypsy Punk, and is used to enhance impressions of 'gypsiness' or 'Balkanness'. One club night called Balkan Fever, held monthly in Helsinki, reported ordering a consignment of false moustaches⁵⁷, and Cork's Balkan Bohemia listed the fancy dress suggestions: 'big skirts, head scarves, golden earrings. Gents: leather waist coat/ braces [sic], wacky hat, moustache!'⁵⁸ A Gypsy Punk event in Washington DC was given the name 'The Fez & Moustache Party', with attendees being encouraged to turn up wearing these accoutrements in order to 'enhance the effects of the music'⁵⁹. This is an indicator that whether or not there is a greater prevalence of moustache growing amongst Roma than in other groups (and we might tentatively state, based on Stewart's study, that in some, though not all, Romani cultures this is the case) Hütz's moustache has led to it becoming claimed a symbol of Gypsy Punk.⁶⁰ In the same way that the safety pin signified punk in the 1970s, or the smiley face was used to represent ecstasy-fuelled rave culture in the late 1980s, the moustache has quickly gained currency as an indicator of Gypsy Punk, demonstrating the importance of

⁵⁶ Edith Durham: *High Albania: A Victorian Traveller's Balkan Odyssey* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p.15.

⁵⁷ 'Moustache & posters arrived', Balkan Fever, 24 April 2009
<<http://balkanfeverhelsinki.blogspot.com/2009/04/moustache-posters-arrived.html>>

⁵⁸ 'Balkan Bohemia 11 March 2009', Balkan Bohemia myspace
<<http://www.myspace.com/balkanbohemia>>

⁵⁹ 'The Fez & Moustache Party @ DC9', Brightest Young Things
<<http://www.brightestyoungthings.com/event/dc9/the-fez-moustache-party.htm>>

⁶⁰ The fez has even less grounding in the reality of Romani or Balkan culture, originating in Morocco and Turkey. Although there has been overlap between styles of music influenced by the Balkans and the Roma, and those that draw from Turkey and North Africa, here the fez is used as nothing more than a signifier of the non-Western.

Hütz's role in the movement.

The use of moustache as signifier recalls Barthes, in particular his essay 'The Romans in Films', in which he observes that all the characters in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's film *Julius Caesar* are wearing fringes: 'What then is associated with these insistent fringes? Quite simply the label of Roman-ness. We therefore see here the mainspring of the Spectacle – the *sign* – operating in the open. The frontal lock overwhelms one with evidence, no one can doubt that he is in Ancient Rome.'⁶¹ In the same way that this hairstyle is taken to signify Rome, Hütz's moustache can be seen as a sign of Gypsy Punk. Indeed, in 2002, Stephen Bayley wrote that 'Had he not been run over by a laundry truck on a Paris street in 1980, Roland Barthes would today be writing about Saddam's moustache, Beckham's crosses, Rollerblades and The Simpsons.'⁶² Since then, rollerblading has coasted out of popular culture, but the moustache remains a relevant signifier. Saddam Hussein is dead, but the thick moustache he wore until his descent into unkempt incarcerated beardedness still has associations with despotism. Hütz's waxed moustache is playful and curvaceous; its forebears might be the moustaches of Salvador Dali or Groucho Marx, rather than the more military and authoritarian styles that informed Saddam and Stalin.

However, Gogol Bordello are not open about their stylistic associations; they conceal any myth-making that they engage in. In 2009, an article was posted on the internet by someone describing themselves as 'a historian of the group'. The anonymous writer complained that much of the information about Gogol Bordello that appeared in the Russian press was distorted: 'This kind of information, revolving around a description of – not the musicians – but their moustaches, colour of their clothes and other details, to which the musicians themselves attach no meaning, should not come from people who are knowledgeable on journalistic ethics.'⁶³ The insistence on the authentic which was present in the mission statement is reinforced here: it is not the outward image of

⁶¹ Barthes, p.26.

⁶² Stephen Bayley: 'The man on the left is Barthes (pron. Bart), the dead French philosopher. The boy on the right is Bart (pron. Bart), the immortal cartoon character. How are they related? Alors, let us count the ways, dude, says Stephen Bayley (pron. Bay-Lee).' *The Independent on Sunday*, 1 December 2002, Features p.1.

⁶³ 'Разгон дезинформации, установление хорошей погоды', Gogol Bordello - Праздник, который всегда <http://community.livejournal.com/gogolbordello_r/145805.html>

the band that is important – this would put them on the same page as The Strokes or Britney Spears – but the artists themselves and the music they play. But hairstyles and clothing will always be remarked upon and imitated: even if the musicians themselves attach no meaning to their appearance. While Hütz's pronouncement that his moustache is not a fashion statement might seem to validate the claims of this article, the consumers of Gypsy Punk certainly attach a meaning to the moustache, which has been mythologised as part of Gypsy Punk.

Moreover, the suggestion that 'the musicians themselves attach no meaning' to their clothes or hair is rather dubious. While the 'historian of the group' states that Hütz 'left the posturing world of fashion long ago, and his moustache is a modest tribute to a family tradition'⁶⁴, this is not the same as saying that he attaches no meaning to the moustache. His facial hair may not function in the same way as the false moustaches of the people attending the 'Fez & Moustache Party', but it is nonetheless a signifier of something. The fact that Hütz's moustache is part of a family tradition does not release it from any connotations it might have; in fact, this serves to load it further with a sense of East European and Romani history and to perpetuate associations between moustaches and Roma or Ukrainians. Similar points can be made about some of Hütz's colleagues – the more typically 'rock' style of tight-fitting jeans and cowboy boots suits Oren Kaplan's role playing electric guitar, and the long silver hair of violinist Sergey Ryabtsev makes him appear to have lived longer than his five decades, and draws him closer to the folk roots of the fiddle. As such, the statement that outward appearance is unimportant tells us that what is really important is the outward appearance of not caring about appearance, which has of course long been central to the style of punk. Although the original stylistic choices of punk are abandoned, having outlived their function of 'Refusal', the sentiment remains the same.

Another signifier of Gypsy Punk style, due to its prominence in one of Gogol Bordello's best-known songs, is the colour purple. In the chorus of 'Start Wearing Purple', Hütz invokes listeners to: 'Start wearing purple for me now', and many fans have taken up the instruction and attend shows bedecked in this hue. It is a plea for derangement – if purple is worn than apparently, 'All your sanity and wits

⁶⁴ 'Разгон дезинформации, установление хорошей погоды'

they will all vanish'. Hütz provides some background for this assertion in his account of the song's origins:

It's one of the very few songs I wrote for a girl. I just moved in with my girlfriend in New York. We had a neighbour: an old woman who was always dressed in purple head to toe. She was clearly bonkers. So whenever my girlfriend and I had an argument and she would start screaming at me, I would say: you might as well start wearing purple now.⁶⁵

This woman may have been a member of the Red Hat Society, a group who take their inspiration from Jenny Joseph's poem 'Warning', and wear purple dresses and red hats. The poem begins:

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.⁶⁶

Its message of abandoning convention and taking on an eccentric appearance recalls Hebdige's assertion that style is a means of interrupting hegemony. While the Red Hat Society is not a significant or serious enough movement to be considered a subculture, it is worth mentioning for this reason. Just as Joseph's poem has inspired a following who enact its message, 'Start Wearing Purple' has brought about its own wave of purple-clad followers. Of course, Gypsy Punks and the Red Hat Society are not the only groups who have adopted the colour, which has a history of non-conformity. Originally it was exclusively for the wealthiest classes, having imperial significance in ancient Rome, due to the expense of producing purple dye. The link between purple and floridness has never been broken, even as far as the colour's application to flowery chunks of 'purple prose'

⁶⁵ Kateryna Khinkulova: 'Ukraine gypsy punk on world stage', *BBC News*
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4493298.stm>>

⁶⁶ Jenny Joseph: 'Warning', *Selected Poems* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), p.42.

in writing. However, it has also been both adopted by and assigned to certain marginalised groups. In the Holocaust, while Jews were made to wear a yellow star, the badge given to Jehovah's Witnesses was a purple triangle.⁶⁷ In a context of celebration rather than persecution, purple has sometimes been adopted as a colour of gay pride.

It is also worth noting that Gogol Bordello are not the first musicians to appropriate the colour, which has long been associated with Prince, and continues to be worn by both he and his fans. In Prince's case, there are clear connections with flamboyance that hark back as far as the togas of Roman emperors (the colour also befits his name) and it is for this reason too that purple is an appropriate shade for Gypsy Punk. The ostentation of the colour can be equated not only with this heritage, but also with the showy style of contemporary hip hop – where we find 'bling' comparable with the gold jewellery worn by many Roma. But in 'Start Wearing Purple', Gogol Bordello give purple another meaning. In this song, it becomes a signifier of insanity, and this contributes to their mythology a sense of abandon and hedonism. As we have seen, these are traits associated with the 'gypsy', so the call for madness contributes to the 'gypsy' part of Gogol Bordello's mythology.

ICONOGRAPHY

It is not only the fashion choices of the band's members that help to create Gogol Bordello's mythology: there are also recurring visual signs that can be found throughout their work, such as in album artwork and merchandise. The symbolism used by Gogol Bordello often reflects elements of their songwriting and performances, so that the mythology that is instigated in their music is reinforced through their iconography. The image most associated with Gogol Bordello, functioning almost as a logo, is a fist holding a catapult, which is primed to hurl a

⁶⁷ Interestingly, the colour allocated to Romani victims by the Nazis is variable, reflecting the lack of certainty regarding whether the Roma were considered an undesirable race, or an undesirable social group. According to Sybil Milton, 'The inverted brown or beige triangle was the special marking used to identify Gypsy prisoners; it was frequently replaced by the more common black triangle for Roma and Sinti prisoners reclassified as "asocials" in the concentration camps.' (Sybil Milton: 'Holocaust: The Gypsies' in Samuel Totton, William S. Parsons and Israel W. Charny (eds.): *Century of Genocide* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.181.

star. This image is displayed at as a backdrop at gigs, and features prominently on the front cover of the album *Gypsy Punks*. ‘The catapult is very symbolic for Gogol Bordello’, Hütz says. ‘It represents taking a shot at the things we hate, like globalisation.’⁶⁸ This is a rather vague explanation, however, as Hütz is not specific here about his understanding of globalisation. As we have previously examined, Gogol Bordello can be regarded as being involved in processes of globalisation themselves: however, the kind of globalisation that they propagate is a hybrid one, as opposed to the homogenising globalisation that they are presumably aiming at with their catapult. However, the mythology of this symbol seems to be more developed than the message that it is supposed to represent. In the context of its use as a symbol by a Gypsy Punk band, the catapult might not represent a total attack all aspects of globalisation, but it is certainly an overt signifier of combat, an instrument of war. The catapult itself is rendered with a bark effect, as though it has been improvised from a piece of forked twig. This is very much in keeping both with the idea of a migrant who has limited resources to work with, and with the DIY ethos of punk; as such it is in itself an effective symbol for Gypsy Punk.

While *Gypsy Punks* uses the slingshot as its defining imagery, its follow-up album, *Super Taranta*, uses its iconography in a different way. This album features a cover that portrays Hütz in performance, drumming on fire buckets – improvised instruments that also correspond with punk’s DIY aesthetic – which are supported on the upturned feet of dancers Pamela Racine and Elizabeth Sun. The open-legged posture of the dancers debauches the image in a way that fits in with the impression Gogol Bordello seek to cultivate (the band’s name is another obvious example of this), while their bodies also echo the Y-shape of the slingshot. This image benefits from consideration with reference to the points made by Todorova about gender associations and the Balkans, which she describes as having a ‘distinctly male appeal’.⁶⁹ She then goes on to say that, ‘In practically every other description, the standard Balkan male is uncivilized, primitive, crude, cruel, and without exception, disheveled.’⁷⁰ Further through her book, Todorova considers reviews of concerts in the West by the Bulgarian clarinettist Ivo Papasov, who she

⁶⁸ Smith: ‘It’s a Man’s World’.

⁶⁹ Maria Todorova: *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.14.

⁷⁰ Todorova, p.14.

says is 'incidentally a Rom'⁷¹. However, in the context of the reports cited by Todorova, the fact that he is Roma is surely not incidental at all, but serves to compound the negativity of his portrayal. In these reviews:

what was accentuated was his crude masculinity. The tones of his clarinet were characterized as "the depressed violence of spirits which have been kept for centuries in the bottle," his music was "frightening, exhilarating arousing." He was described physically as something "in between a third-rate boxer and a tavern-keeper, his orchestra as an impressive team of bearded fellows in ugly shirts, and the public falls to the ground from the 'savage' sight from [Papasov's] quick flute solo through his right nostril."⁷²

This account clearly places Papasov within the framework of the 'standard Balkan male' that Todorova describes earlier. This typical portrayal shares its characteristics with representations of the Balkan region itself, and in using Balkan connotations in the work of Gogol Bordello, Hütz can be seen as embodying the Balkan male. The image on the cover of *Super Taranta*, in which Hütz drums on the dancers' feet, may represent cruelty or primitivism, but it is also a sexualised image. The manner in which Hütz stands over the women with phallic drumsticks poised suggests a discourse of male dominance and female subservience that Gogol Bordello arguably perpetuate. But it is significant that this image appear on a record that is heavily influenced by Balkan and 'gypsy' music: it thus lends a patina of colour and sexuality to the Balkans, qualities which are more commonly associated with the orient, as Todorova states. However, these are qualities that are also associated with 'gypsies', so the image is less effective as a critique of stereotypes than the more explicitly Balkan elements of their work, such as the fictional country of Hützovina.

There were numerous references to the primitive and bestial in Gogol Bordello's earlier work, in which the most prominent visual representations were of animals: beasts of various kinds featured in the artwork that accompanied each

⁷¹ Todorova, p.60.

⁷² Todorova, p.60.

of their first three albums. We have already examined the album artwork of *Voi-La Intruder* in the context of fictional Balkan countries and the portrayal of Hützovina. Here, we find an image of Hütz wearing a goat mask, which is taken from one of their highly visual early performances. This is echoed in the images printed onto the CD itself, which show two figures clad in the skins of animals, possibly goats or deer, with the heads of these animals acting as masks. As is the case with the picture of Hütz as a goat, the images suggest correlations with magic, ritual and shamanism. These are appropriate connotations for a band that draws on Romani music and whose mythology incorporates myths about the Roma, playing on the idea of the 'gypsy' fortune teller and other mystic practices associated with the stereotypical 'gypsy'. The use of figures dressed as animals also suggests a rejection of human cultures and an adoption of the more primitive and animalistic way of life that is associated with the Balkans and with the 'gypsy'.

In the artwork for *Multi-Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, which is designed around images of the cabaret-inflected performances of the band, there are also several drawings of animals. In this album, they are always portrayed alongside weapons. One picture shows a rabbit encircled with daggers, and another features a snake clutching a quantity of arrows in its coils. The front cover of the album bears an image that recurs on several Gogol Bordello T-shirt designs: the head of a deer, portrayed with protruding arrows where its antlers ought to be. This is an ambiguous image; it is unclear whether the deer has been shot in the head and had its antlers removed, or whether it is a living deer that possesses some kind of mythical quality, perhaps gaining greater power from the arrows. The drawing on the album cover is augmented with a pair of crossed swords. It should be noted that the arsenal that could be formed from these images would be somewhat antiquated, being comprised of the kinds of weapons that are rarely, if ever, used in actual combat these days. This has the twofold function of adhering to the Balkan myth of a primitive form of civilisation, and of suggesting that the weaponry is intended to be symbolic rather than functional; here we are also reminded of the catapult that has come to symbolise Gogol Bordello.

Inside the sleeve of *Gypsy Punks*, the two major symbolic elements – animals and arms – are once again brought together, revealing an iconographic continuity

from album to album. We see this not only in imagery, but also in a paragraph of text written inside the album cover, which is presented as being 'From a chronicle of cultural revolution':

"In the old time it was not a crime!"-- he shouted, "Since you were judge you'll die alone in madhouse...", then turned into a rabbit and suddenly was gone... Then this whole fucking thing broke out with gypsy riffs and crazy dubbing... Soon judges were all drunk, the women were complete, and children were chasing the naked one... So since then I believe him... For it was true: along with my mind a one Jamaican siren it was missing from the courthouse.
[sic]⁷³

This passage is closely integrated into the Gypsy Punk mythology that surrounds it. In the references to 'gypsy riffs' and a 'Jamaican siren', the idea of a multicultural form of music that draws on a wide range of sources comes across clearly. The exclamatory, 'In the old time it was not a crime!' is quoted directly from the song 'Not a Crime', and the reproduction of this line provides a backstory and lends greater credence to this chronicle. However, the anonymity of the speaker adds uncertainty and even mystery. The identities of the narrator and 'the naked one' are also unknown; it is as though there is more to this story, about which we remain uninformed. The repeated use of ellipses adds to this impression, suggesting that there may have been more to record, but that it has been forgotten in the revelry. In the last sentence, the narrator says that he has lost his mind; this is an indicator of the intensity of the festivities, and also an allusion to the lost 'sanity and wits' of 'Start Wearing Purple'. Finally, the surreal magic of the speaker's transformation into a rabbit makes this something more than a straightforward narrative; the magical realism of 'Occurrence on the Border' is in evidence here – and once again, with reference to a rabbit.

This rabbit reference in *Gypsy Punks* is supplemented by various pictures of rabbits; as with many other animals in Gogol Bordello's artwork they are

⁷³ *Gypsy Punks* album sleeve (SideOneDummy, 2005).

juxtaposed with weapons. Some are portrayed with spears or axes, while others are shown to be in conflict with a hooded figure that may represent the judge mentioned in the text. In one picture, this man is shown prepared to plunge a knife into an image of a rabbit; in another two rabbits are leading him by a rope tied around his waist. In these drawings, the rabbits are shown in yellow, the only colour in a pair of otherwise monochrome images. This is particularly interesting when considered in the context of the album notes, which state that the images are 'Illustrations from Hütz-Nikolaev's childhood library: *U krajini sonjatchnih zaitchikiv* ("In the land of sunny rabbits"), 1959, Kiev, Ukraine, by V. Chernuha.' Although it seems certain from the style of the images that the Ukrainian illustrator Valentin Chernuha is indeed the artist, the contrast between the black and white images and the yellow rabbits means that the pictures may appear to be a composite of Chernuha's work and other images, which has been created in order to fit in with the mythology of the sleeve notes in *Gypsy Punks*.

As we are aware, rabbits appear not only in Gogol Bordello's iconography, but also in their lyrics: we have already considered the rabbit in 'Occurrence on the Border', which serves a magical realist function, as does the metamorphosing rabbit described inside the sleeve of *Gypsy Punks*. But a further reference to rabbits can be found in another song on *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, entitled 'Through the Roof 'n' Underground'. This song describes the process of escaping 'through the roof and underground' in order to avoid the dominance of homogenising globalisation. We first encounter rabbits in the following lines:

And as the boy scouts learn to read between the lines
The silver rabbits hop between their fathers' lies
And boy scouts ask, "Pa? Where do they go?"
They go to the country that they only know.

Here the rabbits function in the same way as in 'Occurrence on the Border', providing a magical escape from the travails of day to day life. However, this is not magical realism in the same way that the rabbit on a 'pogo-gypsy stick' is; the 'fathers' lies' are obviously intangible, and these rabbits are more metaphorical

than magical realist. Nonetheless, they seem mysterious, and perhaps incorporeal. Their silver colour only compounds their ghostliness. The rabbits are reintroduced at a moment of victory later on in the song:

And when their own walls they will a-crumble
And all the systems will be discombumbled
Around the stump of bigotry
Serebrjanniye zaitzy tam vodjay chorovod!

The English translation of the last line is, 'the silver rabbits dance a round-dance'. Ultimately, therefore, the rabbits are presented as symbols of victory; they are present to dance in celebration when the border fences have been pulled down and the tree of bigotry has been felled. But it is curious that this line, which explains what will happen when walls and systems have collapsed, is sung in Ukrainian rather than English. Although many of Gogol Bordello's songs use multiple languages, this is the only line in 'Through the Roof 'n' Underground' that is not in English. But this single line is enough to change the song from a straightforward hymn of the counterculture to something more particular. As with the Ukrainian and Romani at the start of 'Occurrence on the Border', the identity of the language being used will not be clear to all listeners, so it functions as an indistinct symbol of the 'gypsies' and Balkan location that Gogol Bordello represent. When the line is translated and we notice the reappearance of the silver rabbits, we find in the combination of a foreign language and a recurring sign a complex mythology.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty has considered the presence of animals in myth in her investigation into representations of 'others' in myths. She has said that the 'others' of mythology are the people who cluster on the borders of what we define as ourselves – our Western, human, mortal, adult nature: they are strangers (primarily in the sense of non-Westerners), animals, gods, and children.⁷⁴ In Gogol Bordello's album artwork, animals are used because of their position as others: they represent figures or groups that are widely regarded as 'others' but

⁷⁴ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty: *Other People's Myths* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p.2.

which are central to the mythology of Gypsy Punk. Another layer is added when we consider that in mythology animals often represent strangers and gods: in Gogol Bordello's iconography they might therefore stand for both 'others' in general, and specific 'others'. It is also noteworthy that the animals portrayed in Gogol Bordello's iconography are almost exclusively wild beasts. This is interesting in terms of what it may connote; the 'gypsy' element of Gypsy Punk is not explicitly foregrounded here, as the animals associated with the Roma are domestic ones such as horses and dogs. It is possible that the wildness thought to be characteristic of the 'gypsy' is conveyed here; however, it is more likely that the symbolism of the wild animal represents the untameable nature of the Balkans, and perhaps even of its inhabitants, that is integral to the balkanist discourse with which Gogol Bordello engage.

The centrality of rabbits to their iconography is interesting in this context: rabbits can be either wild or domesticated, so there is a suggestion of tameness, but the constant juxtaposition of weapons ensures that the overriding impression is of wildness or antagonism. Hütz's use of a goat mask acts in a similar way, despite the fact that the goat is a domesticated animal: in putting on the mask he is becoming less human and more bestial. O'Flaherty has shown that animals and strangers can be grouped together as 'others' when engaging with myth, and when Hütz becomes animal, his status as a stranger is emphasised. It is possible to compile a list of 'others' that relates to Gypsy Punk mythology in particular; this would include 'gypsies', the Balkans and the inhabitants of that region, people from behind the Iron Curtain, immigrants, and those involved in subcultures such as punk. Hütz represents all of these groups and, in addition, is an 'other' for many of us in the West simply because he is from Eastern Europe. When he puts on the goat mask, he draws attention to his 'otherness', but in the wider discourse of myth, the amalgamation of man and beast that he displays may be suggestive of some kind of divinity: it is as though he has the ability to change his outward appearance at will. Such is the confusion of the uninformed observer, however, that a god might be mistaken for a beast or a foreigner.

Yet it is not only gods that might provoke this misjudgement, but also devils. This can be observed in the inspiration for Hütz's Voi-La Intruder narrative, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, when the Devil first appears: 'He looked to be a little over forty. Mouth somehow twisted. Clean-shaven. Dark-haired. Right eye black, left – for some reason – green. Dark eyebrows, but one higher than the other. In short, a foreigner.'⁷⁵ The failure of Bulgakov's mortal characters to realise who they have encountered is an integral part of the novel, but more pertinent to our understanding of Gypsy Punk is the inverse of this situation – the stranger mistaken for a devil, or fear of the 'other'. Such apprehension of 'otherness' is prevalent when other cultures are invoked, as is the case with Gypsy Punk. This is something that can be reacted to with magical realism, as Christopher Warnes has pointed out: 'Magical realism in its postcolonial forms can thus be seen as a response to the "othering" that accompanies western colonialism, supported as it is in the modern period by the universalist claims of reason.'⁷⁶ Such a response can be seen in *Multi-Kontra Culti vs. Irony*, where the 'otherness' of the Balkans is reacted to through the use of rabbits bouncing on pogo sticks or dancing round tree stumps. While the Balkans have not been subject to colonialism since the heyday of the Ottoman Empire, an ongoing tendency to 'other' the region has remained, as we have seen when engaging with balkanism.

Warnes divides magical realism into two types. The first, faith-based type, 'often assumes a vatic function, calling upon the reader to suspend rational-empirical judgements about the way things are in favour of an expanded order of reality. Frequently, though not always, it does this in order to recuperate a non-western cultural world view.'⁷⁷ The other strand of magical realism, which is based around irreverence, 'seeks to critique the claims to truth and coherence of the modern, western world view by showing them up as culturally and historically contingent.'⁷⁸ Toying with Western conceptions of the Balkans, Hützovina falls

⁷⁵ Mikhail Bulgakov: *The Master and Margarita* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.10.

⁷⁶ Christopher Warnes: *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.152.

⁷⁷ Warnes, p.12.

⁷⁸ Warnes, p.13.

into the latter category, as we can see more clearly if we follow Warnes' idea of irreverence back to its starting point: 'Irreverence in the Borgesian sense is a ludic, critical attitude favoured by intellectuals and writers marginalised by reasons of geography, race, or culture, yet who are still able to avail themselves of the cultural resources of the centre.'⁷⁹ This is where Gogol Bordello's mythology has its roots. As an immigrant who came from a Soviet state, Hütz is to an extent marginalised by his background; he compounds this by foregrounding his Romani connections in order to provide a suitable context for the instances of magical realism that pepper his work and the mythology that surrounds it. His frequent talk of revolution adds an extra layer to the resulting mythology. Hütz uses a language that is typical of popular music subculture and which has been repeated by an array of musicians. As a result, the Gypsy Punk mythology seems accessible, even if there is a hidden subtext to it. This is typical of recent manifestations of mythology, as Marina Warner has observed, drawing on Warnes:

But to borrow Christopher Warnes' contrast between ontology and irreverence in his *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, the approach of contemporary retellers of myths [...] makes clear that the readers they have in mind aren't concerned with sacred matters and are impatient with spiritual meaning. These writers have adopted a looser, secular conception of myth, which flattens hierarchies between faith and superstition, and doesn't discriminate, as a Victorian anthropologist would have done, between high and low culture, between stories about gods, which are rooted in belief and enacted through ritual, and tales of goblins and fairies and witches, told to raise shivers of pleasurable fear on a dark winter night.⁸⁰

While this is the kind of mythology that Gogol Bordello has created, theirs is not simply a flattening myth; there is also a greater depth to it. O'Flaherty has questioned 'what happens to people who realize that they are part of other

⁷⁹ Warnes, p.97.

⁸⁰ Marina Warner: 'Witchiness', *London Review of Books* Vol. 31, No. 16 (27 Aug. 2009), p.23.

peoples' myths'⁸¹ and in order to answer this has engaged with the metamyth, 'a text that reflects self-consciously on another myth'⁸². We have already seen that the mythology of Gypsy Punk is derived in part from the myths that have been created about the Roma and the Balkans. For example, the 'gypsy' fortune teller is a stock figure in many Western stories and has been for many years; more recently, the hostile authority figure in the employ of a communist government, perhaps a soldier or a police officer, has become a stereotype of fictions and cinema that deal with the Balkans. These are the characters of the Gypsy Punk myth, figures who have been inducted into Western mythologies about the Roma or the Balkans, and who are now being reclaimed for a new mythology. The Gypsy Punk myth thus functions as a metamyth. It takes Western perceptions and reworks them to produce a mythology that retains the motifs their Western audience are familiar with, but it also adds further detail in order to suggest the heightened sense of 'otherness' that is expected of 'gypsy' and Balkan culture.

We have already determined that Gogol Bordello interrupt extant myths, simultaneously conforming to their modes of representation and subverting them, by establishing a new mythology of their own. Gogol Bordello form this mythology through several methods: its revolutionary framework is created through the rhetoric of their manifesto and other statements, and its relationship with other myths is realised not only by the means of music, but also through performance, style and iconography. Ultimately, the creation of 'otherness' within the Gypsy Punk metamyth is significant. However, there is one more important 'other' that we have yet to engage with: the immigrant. This figure, and its importance within Gypsy Punk, requires an in-depth examination that builds on Gogol Bordello's mythology, and such an examination will be provided in the following chapter.

⁸¹ O'Flaherty, p.97.

⁸² O'Flaherty, p.100.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Immigrant space and immigrant music

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 2008

Gogol Bordello's New Years' mini-tour of the Eastern Seaboard brought me to New York at the end of an unseasonably mild December. A combination of economy and curiosity led me to stay part of my time there in a Bowery flophouse hotel. These cut-rate establishments once thrived in the area, but have more recently declined as a result of health and safety standards and the gentrification of the Bowery. The hotel was noisy and cramped – rather than having rooms, it had windowless cubicles whose walls stopped short of the ceiling – but it was cheap, and perfectly located. Just across the street was the location of the now closed CBGB; more importantly, the venues for the Gogol Bordello shows and afterparties were very close by.

A New York show is a homecoming show for Gogol Bordello, and the Lower East Side in particular is the neighbourhood that can be best described as their home. It is here that the band formed and became established, and its histories of immigrant experience and punk culture have undoubtedly informed Gypsy Punk. The area was sporadically adorned with signs that read 'No Loitering' and, as if in defiance of these notices, there were many groups of men standing around in doorways or on street corners. As we headed further downtown, one pair of loiterers accosted us, and one of them explained that he wanted us to answer a single question. Perhaps they could discern that we were from out of town and wanted to derive some amusement from our ignorance of the locality, or maybe they had decided to stop the first passersby they encountered in order to settle an argument or a wager. I didn't care what their reasoning was, but I was happy to go along with their game. It crossed my mind that they might be trying to carry out

some con, but the area was busy, and as long as we kept some distance from the loiterers it seemed unlikely that we could be robbed or attacked. The man who had caught our attention signalled towards his friend with a finger.

‘Guess what his nationality is.’

My first response was rather too literal. ‘American,’ I said.

‘No,’ said the man in question. ‘What’s my ethnicity, my national background.’

After my initial blunder I was disinclined to play this game too hard, and chose the first possibility that came into my head: ‘French?’

‘Wrong!’ he intoned, sounding very pleased at my failure. His companion asked my girlfriend if she could do any better.

‘Russian,’ she said, giving the question a bit more thought than I had.

‘No!’ said the man who had spoken first.

‘I’m Italian!’ shouted the other, gleefully.

Of course, the New York Italian, the classic stereotype of mafia movies. As we continued on our way, he shouted after us: ‘You’re wrong!’

Yes, we were wrong, but in the Lower East Side, what were our chances of being correct? In an area that has seen a continual influx of immigrants for over a century, in a country that was developed by immigrants, the potential heritage of any given inhabitant might be one or more of any number of nationalities or races. That’s why Gypsy Punk is so connected with the Lower East Side: not only because that is where it began, but also because the multi-ethnic clash of styles that characterises bands like Gogol Bordello is like a performative microcosm of that part of New York City.

MYTHOLOGIES OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE

In this chapter, I examine the function of New York’s Lower East Side as the location of origin of Gypsy Punk, considering its immigrant past, and the way that this has been romanticised and mythologised. I then introduce the idea of immigrant music as an alternative to the established genre of world music, and consider how it might also function as an alternative to ‘gypsy’ music. Finally, I

examine the function of the immigrant figure in Gogol Bordello's work, and the ways in which Gypsy Punk acts as an immigrant music. The mythologisation of the Lower East Side led to it becoming an important subcultural site, and the histories of both immigration and subculture are equally important to Gypsy Punk, as I will demonstrate through a close examination of some of Gogol Bordello's work. Having introduced the concept of immigrant music, I will consider several examples of bands that can be thought of as producing immigrant music, and examine their engagement with their migrant histories and with the contemporary immigrant experience. For Gogol Bordello, the Lower East Side is central to both past and present, as we shall see. We will then examine the immigrant experiences of the members of Gogol Bordello, and the manner in which these experiences are portrayed and mythologised within the band and their work. This will lead us into a discussion of several different immigrant figures: specifically, immigrants, migrants and nomads; and from here we will examine how issues pertaining to both immigrants and the Roma come together in Gypsy Punk. Finally, we will determine how Gypsy Punk can be considered a form of immigrant music, and the implications that it has for this nascent genre.

The Lower East Side is located in downtown Manhattan and is generally considered to have its perimeters at East Houston Street in the north, the Bowery in the West and Canal Street in the South. It is well known for having acted as a first stop for several generations of immigrants arriving in the USA, with this constant flow of immigration commencing towards the end of the nineteenth century and continuing for almost a hundred years. Christopher Mele has commented that, 'The relatively small area – fourteen streets crossed by six avenues – was home to a polyglot of Irish, Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and Italians along with Russian, German and Polish Jews, and a handful of other ethnic and religious groups.'¹ Angus Fraser has written that from the 1880s, European Roma were among the groups who began to migrate to America²; upon arrival, the Lower East Side would have been their likely first stopping point. Peter E. Dans makes even more of the diversity of the neighbourhood's immigrant population,

¹ Christopher Mele: *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.49.

² Angus Fraser: *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.235.

saying that, 'The area then became the first stop for Irish, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Jewish, and Chinese immigrants as well as African-Americans and Puerto Ricans, all seeking a better life.'³ However, life on The Lower East Side was not all that comfortable. Immigrants lived in cramped tenement buildings and worked long hours in poor conditions, and rates of both disease and crime were high. This was never an area in which the highest aspirations of immigrants were achieved; rather it was a stopping off point, not far from where the boats carrying them to America had docked.

Although there were many different waves of migration that resulted in immigrant communities, the largest and most commented upon was the influx of European Jews that occurred during the fifty year period that straddles the start of the twentieth century. In his history of multicultural America, Ronald Takaki characterises the Lower East Side as a predominantly Jewish destination, describing how, 'A new Jewish community blossomed as massive waves of Russian Jews began arriving in the 1880s; by 1905, the Lower East Side had a population of a half-million Jews.'⁴ The reason for their arrival was the rise of anti-Semitic pogroms that were occurring in Russia at this time, and their migration has often been described an exodus. Takaki has also pointed out the scale of immigration that was taking place, noting that 'By the beginning of World War I, one-third of all Jews in Russia and eastern Europe had emigrated, most of them to the United States.'⁵

The large Jewish population that inhabited the Lower East Side at this time has meant that the area is thought of as a specifically Jewish space as much as it has been considered more generally as an immigrant destination. Hasia R. Diner has examined this view, stating that, 'The Lower East Side has become the American Jewish Plymouth Rock. It has come to stand for Jewish authenticity in America, for a moment in time when undiluted European Jewish culture throbbed

³ Peter E. Dans: 'There Once was a Neighborhood...' in Dans, Rebecca Lepkoff and Suzanne Wasserman: *Life on the Lower East Side* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), p.16.

⁴ Ronald Takaki: *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), p.267.

⁵ Takaki, p.264.

in America.’⁶ This was not the case at the time when Jewish migration to the Lower East Side was in full flow, Diner says, but it is a mythology that has been applied retrospectively, since the migrant Jews have dispersed further into America:

American Jews, however, since the end of World War II and particularly after the 1960s, wanted the Lower East Side to be the place of their memories. [...] They felt, because of the pressures and opportunities of their experiences of the last half of the twentieth century, the need to turn back to the immigrant era and project a particular past, told through the themes of a particular space.⁷

Takaki has also considered the process by which Jews moved on from the Lower East Side, suggesting that they sought to become more American. By moving on from this area that was known for being predominantly the home of Jews and other immigrants, and attempting to assimilate elsewhere in the USA, they increased their status in their adopted country. He characterises this as a second migration: ‘They were migrating again, this time from the Lower East Side. Years earlier, the refugees had fled the shtetls of Russia to what they called the Promised Land. [...] Determined to rise from “greenhorns”, Jews passionately embraced the country’s possibilities, striving to assimilate and become Americans.’⁸ Meanwhile, the Lower East Side clung on as the mythologised location of Jewish and immigrant culture. According to Diner, ‘Tenements, pushcarts, sweatshops, and synagogues inhabited by old men are the images that come instantly to mind with the evocation of the Lower East Side, along with pungent smells, loud noises, crowded spaces, and good, rich food.’⁹ This is a very mixed collection of reference points, which demonstrates the nature of the mythology that has come about. The tenements in which immigrants lived were dangerous and overcrowded, and they

⁶ Hasia R. Diner: *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.8.

⁷ Diner, p.8.

⁸ Takaki, p.290.

⁹ Diner, p.31.

worked in equally unsafe sweatshops where hours were long and pay was poor. However, the pushcarts and markets from which food could be obtained sold high quality produce at cheap prices.

In addition to the retrospective mythologies applied by those who had moved on from the Lower East Side, there were also contemporary mythologies formulated by the better off Americans who lived further uptown. For many of them, the immigrant neighbourhood was little more than a slum or a ghetto, though Mele also addresses the slightly more enlightened view:

The most positive of upper- and middle-class representations of the Lower East Side characterized the neighborhood as a space near the threshold but without the possibility of ever becoming fully “American.” Spaces like the East Side functioned as “immigrant portals” and “staging areas” where newcomers embarked on the journey towards assimilation¹⁰

This representation clearly has parallels with Takaki’s idea of a second migration from the Lower East Side into the rest of America, in which that part of New York is consigned to a mythic past as the Americanised Jews move on. In the previous chapter we considered the mythologisation of the Balkans and how that has informed Gypsy Punk. Here, I intend to briefly examine the mythology of the Lower East Side and its relevance to the Gypsy Punk movement. This is a dual layered mythology, which consists of the portrayals of immigrant communities such as the representations of the Jews considered by Diner, and the idea of the Lower East Side as a centre of artistic and subcultural practice.

Mele has described how in the early twentieth century the area was attractive not only to the immigrants who populated it, but also to the middle classes from elsewhere in New York who were fascinated by its culture. The Lower East Side was associated with the exotic, dangerous and sleazy, and in these associations there was an attraction for young middle class men from uptown. Mele describes how, not content with mere stories about experiences in the

¹⁰ Mele, p.47

immigrant neighbourhoods, they would make clandestine, nocturnal trips into the Lower East Side to indulge in drink, drugs, sex and gambling.¹¹ If we are considering the mythologisation of space, then this notion of the exoticised ghetto can be compared with balkanism and perceptions of Eastern Europe. As is the case with the Balkans, the romance of the Orient is absent from the Lower East Side; it is too dilapidated and too close at hand to be orientalised. But something not unlike Maria Todorova's concept of balkanism is applicable to this part of downtown New York and, given the number of East European migrants who made their homes there, perhaps balkanism itself can provide an appropriate means of looking at the mythologised Lower East Side.

Indeed, Diner has acknowledged that the two locations share a mythology: 'Since the late 1940s, American Jewish memory had been bounded by these two mythic places, eastern Europe and the Lower East Side.'¹² As we have seen, the largest immigrant group to settle in the Lower East Side were European Jews, but it is nonetheless reasonable to consider the neighbourhood as a place that has generated mythologies about the wider community of immigrants. Mele suggests that it was associated with a more authentic way of life as he considers the attraction it held for middle class visitors: 'Few bohemians admired the material conditions of Lower East Side poverty, but many aspired towards a romanticized authenticity of experiences seemingly untouched by bourgeois conventions.'¹³ Visitors to the Lower East Side might be compared to travellers to foreign countries, journeying to a place and exoticising some of its features, to the point that a mythology associated with that place is formed.

Mele's use of the word 'authenticity' is interesting, since this word was also used by Diner when describing the Lower East Side as a site of Jewish culture in America. As we have seen, the idea of authenticity is very important to Gogol Bordello, and the fact that Gypsy Punk began in an area that has been associated in more than one way with authentic experience is likely to have had an effect on their outlook. Mele's point also reveals that the 'authentic' is something that can easily be romanticised or mythologised. Theodor Adorno's critique of the 'jargon

¹¹ Mele, p.73.

¹² Diner, p.18

¹³ Mele, p.74

of authenticity',¹⁴ which we considered in Chapter Four, suggests that the language of authenticity is the product of such romanticism and, as we have seen, this is a criticism that can be applied to the manifesto produced by Gogol Bordello. However, in being rooted in the Lower East Side, Gogol Bordello embody the 'romanticised authenticity of experiences' that Mele describes. As immigrants in the Lower East Side they are authentic figures, but their work inevitably falls into a discourse in which authenticity is something that has been romanticised, or perhaps even mythologised. In the previous chapter we examined Gogol Bordello's use of extant myths in the production of their own mythology, and here we can observe that even if Gypsy Punk is working with mythologised ideas of the authentic, the sense of authenticity in their work is not necessarily negated, as these existing myths can in fact be used to create something novel.

In the Lower East Side, a mythologised perception of migrant experience persisted even after many immigrants had moved on – for example, the neighbourhood's Jewish associations remain to this day. This is not to say that the Lower East Side ceased to be a space inhabited by immigrants; from the 1950s many Puerto Ricans arrived, and remnants of many waves of immigration remain, creating a diverse community. Sharon Zukin summarises the way that the area moved from being a location of immigrant groups to being a site of subculture when she writes, 'From the 1950s through the 1980s most cultural migrants came to the East Village [as part of the Lower East Side would become known] because they felt "different", and they believed the neighborhood was "authentic" because of its concentration of difference.'¹⁵ A different kind of authenticity thus became associated with the Lower East Side. This change came in part from its proximity to Greenwich Village, which counted a growing number of artists, writers and musicians amongst its residents, and had been considered an epicentre of bohemianism and counterculture since the early twentieth century.

Greenwich Village was the starting point for all manner of cultural movements in America, including socialism, feminism, Marxism and the avantgarde and it has been suggested that almost every important writer and artist

¹⁴ Theodor Adorno: *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.5.

¹⁵ Sharon Zukin: *Naked City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.99.

lived there at some point. Like the Lower East Side, it was in its heyday a community comprised heavily of people from outside of New York. Its former residents include Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg, Jimi Hendrix and even Leon Trotsky. Like the Lower East Side, it has been mythologised extensively, though in a quite different way.¹⁶ However, in the 1960s, when Greenwich Village became gradually more gentrified (Zukin has argued that the pursuit of authenticity in cities like New York drives gentrification¹⁷) and the cost of living there rose, the beatniks and hippies who made up much of its current population relocated to the northern part of the cheaper Lower East Side. This subcultural influx changed the character of the neighbourhood, which became dissociated from the rest of the Lower East Side and acquired the new 'East Village' moniker. A New York Times article cites local guides and determines that this designation came into use in the early 1960s:

A 1958 New York City Guide and Almanac makes no mention of an East Village and includes the neighborhood in its section on the Lower East Side. But a 1964 guide, "Earl Wilson's New York," reports that in the "melting pot" of the Lower East Side, "artists, poets and promoters of coffeehouses from Greenwich Village are trying to remelt the neighborhood under the high-sounding name of 'East Village.'"¹⁸

Although it was the beatnik and hippie countercultures that first moved into the new East Village, by the 1970s they were in decline, having come to be associated with criminality and deviance rather than with freedom and liberalism. The East Village retained its label and its distinction from the Lower East Side, but underwent a period of decay as many of its artistic residents moved away. In the hippie peak of the East Village we can find parallels with the movements of Jewish immigrants in the Lower East Side. In both cases a new wave of residents migrated to the area, and having established themselves there they then dispersed

¹⁶ See Ross Wetzsteon: *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

¹⁷ Zukin, p.18.

¹⁸ Jesse McKinley: 'F.Y.I.', *The New York Times* 1 January 1995.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/01/nyregion/fyi-649895.html>>

and assimilated with wider society throughout the USA. By the 1970s the Lower East Side was therefore seen very much as a transient space; whether it was inhabited by migrants from other countries or the followers of countercultures, it was a location in which groups of outsiders could settle.

By this time, however, there was significant dereliction in the neighbourhood, with many residents moving away. This migration was not confined to the hippies: almost half of the Puerto Rican immigrants who had created a community known as 'Loisaida' also moved on.¹⁹ It was in this climate of decay that the punk movement established its presence in the Lower East Side, as Mele notes:

For an emerging subculture of disaffected middle-class youth, however, the social-cultural landscape of cynicism, chaos, and social decline inspired a belligerent cultural critique of mainstream and increasingly commodified society. When the subcultures of punk and related underground scene developed in the New York in the 1970s, they flourished in the landscape of the East Village amidst the abundance of signs and symbols of urban decay.²⁰

As clubs like CBGB appeared and became well known, the Lower East Side was re-established as a location for artistic production, and the origins of the area's recent revival can be traced back to this time. However, we can see from Steven Lee Beeber's work, the immigrant history of the Lower East Side was not lost amongst the more recent associations that it acquired. Beeber's argument is that punk is a Jewish genre, and since Jewish immigrants have historically had a strong presence in New York – and particularly the Lower East Side, where punk was concentrated – this is perhaps not surprising. Revelations that many prominent punks were Jewish may be interesting, as Beeber points out, when the use of swastikas in punk imagery is considered, but the actual number of Jews playing punk music is less consequential. Even the fact that, in London, the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm

¹⁹ Mele, p.182.

²⁰ Mele, p.213.

MacLaren was raised by his Jewish grandmother seems unimportant to his artistic output. However, there are some figures whose relationships with their origins are more interesting. Hilly Kristel, who founded the CBGB, is a good example of one such character. Although he is best known as a club owner in the history of punk, he was in addition a strong musician, beginning his career first as a violinist and then as a singer. Kristel himself associated his instrument with his Jewish background:

The violin, of course, maybe because of the size, maybe because it's easy to transport, was always symbolic. I mean, somebody in almost every Jewish home played the violin. [...] And whatever you can carry around that's worth something when you go, if you're chased away, you've got to take it with you.²¹

Beeber may be overstating the importance of Jewish involvement in punk – it is true that Jewish immigrants have been well represented and highly influential in most areas of American culture, but singling out punk as an area in which this influence has been particularly important seems rather arbitrary. However, more recently it has become possible to detect influences from traditional Jewish music in some New York punk; indeed Gogol Bordello have been said to have a klezmer sound. Another New York band that has been classified as Gypsy Punk is Golem, who draw directly on klezmer music where Gogol Bordello's influences are 'gypsy'. This sound is also associated with the Balkans, and many of Golem's lyrics also comment on the immigrant experience, so in terms of the places invoked the comparisons between the two bands are certainly relevant. Although Beeber's argument may be equally applicable to any number of cultural forms, it does remind us of the thread that connects New York immigrants with New York subculture, and of how that thread is woven through the Lower East Side.²² For example, his portrayal of the Ramones as a Jewish American band is of particular interest not because it foregrounds the Jewishness of the group but because it examines their immigrant backgrounds.

²¹ Steven Lee Beeber: *The Heebie-Jeebies at CBGB's* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006), p.77.

²² Beeber, p.xi.

Tommy Ramone was born Tamás Erdélyi in Budapest in 1949 and emigrated to America with his parents in 1956. Having lived through World War II in Europe, they realised that the Soviet invasion of Hungary was likely to herald further anti-Semitism and decided to flee. The other Ramones were also, like so many other New Yorkers, of immigrant stock. Johnny's background was Irish, Dee Dee was half German and had grown up in a divided Berlin, and Joey was descended from some of the many East European Jews who had settled in the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century. Discussing Tommy Ramone, who founded and produced the Ramones, Beeber says, 'The band fulfilled a fantasy of his, provided a lifeline to surviving in America where he often felt an immigrant. It was a way of getting rid of the violence and angst that he'd acquired living as a Jew in exile.'²³

This comment about survival is particularly interesting when we recall a point made by Eugene Hütz: 'Reggae and gypsy music were created by poor people with nothing to lose [...]. They had to find a new way to look at the world'.²⁴ The connection between music and survival that Tommy Ramone felt is nowhere stronger than it is in the forms of music that have inspired Gypsy Punk. This is not confined to reggae and gypsy music, but also the punk that emerged in the dilapidated Lower East Side in the 1970s. Indeed, Gogol Bordello can be compared to the Ramones as an immigrant band; the migratory path taken by Tommy Ramone acts as an antecedent for Hütz's movement from Ukraine to the USA, and in both bands involved a coalescence of first and second generation immigrants from varied backgrounds.

Gypsy Punk continues the legacy of bands like the Ramones, and also that of the many waves of migration to America, by being deeply rooted in New York and the Lower East Side. This is reflected in some of Gogol Bordello's material, particularly in the albums *Multi Kontra Culti vs. Irony* and *Gypsy Punks*. Their debut, *Voi-La Intruder*, was located in the fictional land of Hützovina, but while *Multi Kontra Culti* does refer to Hützovina, it appears to be partially rooted in New York, or at least a semi-mythical version of that city. Its opening song 'When the Trickster Starts A-Poking (Bordello Kind of Guy)' describes a night of debauchery

²³ Beeber, p.104.

²⁴ 'Gypsy Punks', *16 Blocks Magazine*, Issue 1 (Oct. 2007), p.16.
<<http://issuu.com/16blocksmagazine/docs/200811>>

that begins in an unspecified location but culminates with the narrator driving through New York. Then 'Let's Get Radical', a critique of the uninvolved consumption of immigrant cultures, begins 'She says let's go to Brighton Beach / And tap our foot to disco'. Brighton Beach is an area in Brooklyn that is home to a large Russian community. Cyrillic signage can be seen on many shop fronts there, Russian can be heard in the streets, and the residents dress in fur coats that are more typical of fashions in Moscow or Kiev. The cultural tourist described in this song seems to be a more recent manifestation of the middle class sightseers who visited the Lower East Side in the early twentieth century, attracted by its foreignness and the pleasures it reputedly held. However, to merely tap one's feet at a Brighton Beach disco is to be less involved and indicates a lack of integration. Brighton Beach appears again in 'Smakatch', suggesting that Gogol Bordello have an identification with the immigrant community there that runs deeper than that of the visitor.

The immigrants of Brighton Beach have arrived much more recently than those of the Lower East Side, so this area acts as an effective point of reference for Hütz, who is also a recent arrival. But as Gogol Bordello evolved and the reference points of Gypsy Punk broadened, the Lower East Side, with its well developed mythologies of immigration, became a more useful setting. In the 2005 album *Gypsy Punks* the relationship between Gogol Bordello and New York reached its apex. This album deals more closely with the position of the immigrant than any of their others, with songs like 'I Would Never Wanna Be Young Again' and 'Immigrant Punk' detailing the experiences of arriving in America and carving a niche in society for oneself amongst the immigrant community. *Gypsy Punks* is relevant to many aspects of the immigrant experience, but here it is the direct references to Lower East Side localities that demand examination. For example, the song 'Dogs Were Barking' takes as its subject the flamboyance of a Balkan gypsy wedding and relocates it in downtown New York. The line, 'I'll meet you 10-45 on the Broadway Canal / in a disco radical transglobal' is a direct reference to the Mehanata, the Bulgarian bar that has become part of Gypsy Punk mythology, which was formerly located at the intersection of Broadway and Canal Street.

Another song from *Gypsy Punks* that refers to a Lower East Side location is

'Avenue B'. Avenue B is a street in the Eastern part of the district in an area known as Alphabet City – this derives from the avenues here which use letters rather than numbers as their names, where Manhattan bulges out east of 1st Avenue. Gogol Bordello are not the first musicians to take inspiration from Avenue B – it is also the title of a 1999 Iggy Pop album, and therefore, Gogol Bordello's 'Avenue B' can be taken as an homage to both the Lower East Side and to one of their punk forefathers. The song describes 'Sitting in a Russian bathhouse on the Avenue B', as though this is a significant part of the immigrant experience.²⁵ As with many of Gogol Bordello's songs, there is prominent use of languages other than English; in this case Russian is used for several lines, including, 'Nesmotrja na SE. SHE. A. ne poterjal azarta / Buhaju strogo kazdoje 8-e marta'. Translated into English, this means, 'In spite of the USA I did not lose the passion / I still drink heavily every 8th of March'. 8 March is International Woman's Day, a holiday that is observed in many countries, particularly those that were formerly part of the USSR. 'Avenue B' therefore presents the figure of an immigrant who has chosen not to assimilate in the way that many new arrivals in the Lower East Side did. Adam Thirlwell has described the song as 'the ultimate American, the ultimate immerican.'²⁶ This idea of the 'immerican', a person who straddles the states of being American and un-American, is an interesting way of describing the immigrant figure that appears in Gogol Bordello's work and will be relevant as we go on to consider Gypsy Punk as an immigrant music. Carol Silverman says of Gogol Bordello that 'A typical song theme, often performed in multiple languages (Russian; English, sometimes mangled; and Romani, sometimes mangled), describes the refugee/immigrant caught between two cultures and inventing his own.'²⁷ The 'immerican' could be said to be undertaking such an invention.

²⁵ The Russian bathhouse in Alphabet City is not actually located on Avenue B. Hütz concedes that, 'It's on 10th between 1st and A, and it's been a case of false advertisement all these years simply because when I first came to New York about ten years ago, there were a couple of times when I had no place to stay, and through my East European connections I ended up calling somebody who allowed me to stay right here. So of course we got drunk here and exploited all the facilities, and that's why I thought that it was on Avenue B.' (Eric Helton: Hit a Russian Bathhouse with Gogol Bordello's Eugene Hütz. *Rolling Stone* <[http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/?kw=\[video-Gallery-page,138165\]>](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/?kw=[video-Gallery-page,138165]>))

²⁶ Adam Thirlwell: 'Book Notes: *The Escape*', *Largehearted Boy*, 4 August 2010 <http://www.largeheartedboy.com/blog/archive/2010/08/book_notes_adam_2.html>

²⁷ Carol Silverman: *Romani Routes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.265.

The figure of the 'immerican', the immigrant in America, has also been invoked in Gogol Bordello's performances, through their increased use of props and scenery. The band have typically performed in front of the backdrop of a banner bearing their slingshot logo, but this has until recently been the only substantial piece of scenery. While playing in support of *Gypsy Punks* they made use of improvised percussion instruments including washboards and fire buckets, but they have now also begun to use items that have only a visual, rather than a musical, effect. At their Kentish Town Forum show in December 2010, for example, there seemed to be a nautical theme. Propped up against a stage monitor in front of Hütz's microphone stand there was a ship's wheel; this was never referred to or used in any way during the performance, so was evidently intended only as a visual detail. More prominent was the model of a lighthouse at the back of the stage. This appeared to be around two metres tall, so could only have been incorporated into the show once Gogol Bordello had become established enough to undertake large scale tours with roadies and vehicles for transporting this kind of equipment. The lighthouse seemed to serve little function for much of the show, until, shortly before the band returned on stage to play their encore, its light began to flash. It remained illuminated as they played the first song of the encore, 'Sun Is On My Side'. This is a less energetic, acoustic-based, song that is not suited to the high-energy stagecraft of much of Gogol Bordello's other material, so the lighthouse was perhaps intended to add visual interest at this point. Nonetheless, it seemed a little underwhelming compared to the energy generated elsewhere in the performance.

However, it seems probable that the lighthouse had a more significant purpose than merely acting as an additional visual stimulus. Gogol Bordello's early performances included theatrical sketches that served as statements about immigration and the movement of people, and it may make sense to consider the props of their more recent shows as a continuation of this kind of performance, albeit one that takes a quite different form. With the ship's wheel at the front of the stage, and the lighthouse behind, the stage comes to represent a boat and Gogol Bordello become its passengers. The front of the stage functions as a prow and

Hütz, leading his band in their performance, acts as the ship's captain. Behind Hütz and his crew is the lighthouse, signifying a land that they have left behind, as they leave as migrants. When the lighthouse is illuminated during the encore, it is as though land has been sighted once again and the destination has been reached. As such, the whole performance represents a journey from one place to another and emphasises the fact that Gogol Bordello is a band comprised of immigrants.

Gogol Bordello are by no means the only immigrant band to be associated with the Lower East Side. As we have seen, the klezmer punk band Golem use the Jewish mythologies of the Lower East Side and its immigrant associations to reinforce their sound. Although most of their members are not Jewish, the fact that they play a style of music associated with Jewish migrants, combined with their Lower East Side location, lends them greater credibility than they might otherwise have. The connection between Gypsy Punk and Jewishness is part of the Lower East Side's history: Rebecca Jablonsky sees Gypsy Punk as part of 'a history in which Jews have used cultural borrowing as a means of aligning themselves with non-white persecuted populations'²⁸, and although they are not strictly a Jewish band, Golem can be regarded as part of this tradition.

Also mixing klezmer with other styles, including reggae and hip-hop, is Balkan Beat Box. Although their work has gone on to transcend the limits of the Balkan Beats scene, they are still widely held to be part of that movement – their name is of course a likely reason for this. They are also sometimes considered to be Gypsy Punk; this is partly explained by the fact that their saxophonist Ori Kaplan is a former member of Gogol Bordello, and that the two bands have collaborated, releasing an album as the collective J.U.F. Describing the early work of Balkan Beat Box in New York, Kaplan has said:

Our early work went straight from the oven and into the clubs [...].

It was played in indie rock clubs, and listened to by hipsters.

People were tired of hearing techno at that time, there was a great mix of people in New York seeking their own soundtrack. This is a

²⁸ Rebecca Jablonsky: 'Russian Jews and "Gypsy Punks": The Performance of Real and Imagined Cultural Identities within a Cultural Migrant Group', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, Volume 24, Issue 1, p.21.

New York beat, but it's connected to music that goes back a thousand years to the Mediterranean Pond.²⁹

This connection is a result of the history of immigration which has become a crucial part of the history of New York, and particularly of the Lower East Side. Although some waves of immigration have been faster and denser than others, the area has always retained its unique diversity. It is not surprising that this mix of cultures has developed a soundtrack; and bearing in mind that subcultural forms have existed alongside immigrant communities, it is no less surprising that that soundtrack should turn out to be Gypsy Punk. The mythologies of the Lower East Side reveal an immigrant space that is half actual and half mythical, and this is reflected in its music. The transient nature of this location means that its geography is less important to its identity than the changing population that occupies it. As such, the structure of the Lower East Side is in fact comparable with that of music; it is both spatial and temporal, and as its immigrant and subcultural populations move from place to place, it is constantly changing in respect of both.

Gypsy Punk does not only comment on the situation of first generation migrants in the USA; in its combination of established musical forms and more recent imports, it also reminds listeners of America's immigrant histories. Of course, we are well aware of the fact that America's population is made up almost entirely of migrants, either those whose families have moved to the USA in previous centuries, or those immigrants who have arrived much more recently. As a result, it is reasonable enough to presume that the music of America is an immigrant music, one which has been brought into the country by immigrants. Of course, it is not quite this simple, largely because there is no single music that can be described as 'American music'; instead, there are numerous styles and genres which continue to evolve and blend. In fact, this description can apply to any other country; there is equally no single music that can be described as 'Brazilian music', nor a single 'Indian music', 'Hungarian music' or, as we have considered at length, 'gypsy music'. However, amongst Western consumers of music who have become

²⁹ Alan Ashton-Smith: "One Route for the Whole World to Go On": An Interview with Balkan Beat Box', *PopMatters.com* <<http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/124224-one-route-for-the-whole-world-to-go-on-an-interview-with-balkan-beat/>>

used to the range of styles commonly produced and performed in the urban centres of Western countries, from jazz, through blues and rock 'n' roll, to rap and hip hop, there is a prevalence of this kind of simplistic assignation of genre based on origin. Designations like these are certainly highly generalised, but more generalised still is the commonly used term world music, which is sometimes applied to forms of what I would describe as immigrant music. My use of this term is intended as a way of moving on from the notion of world music and subsequently also from the idea of 'gypsy' music.

The world music genre, which was first created in the late 1980s by record company executives³⁰ has frequently been criticised for its generality; all music is world music, say some detractors. And there is no music that can be said to represent the whole world; Wilfred Raussert reminds us that 'The global, we argue, has not (yet) found its artistic representation, neither in literature nor the visual arts, nor music.'³¹ Jocelyne Guilbault noted that the term has commercial rather than artistic purposes, when she wrote that it:

openly encapsulates a very wide range of new musics and, by doing so, succeeds more easily in controlling a market that had so far remained untapped and uncircumscribed by the dominant music industry. This label, in effect, has served as a means of recuperation and appropriation of popular musics that have developed "outside", as it were, the traditional channels of the Anglo-American industry.³²

But this does not mean that world music is a branding that has generated huge profits for record labels; it remains something of a niche market. Eugene Hütz has said that he has avoided associating Gogol Bordello with the term because 'kids in

³⁰ See Martin Stokes: 'Music and the Global Order', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 33 (2004), p.52, and Simon Frith: 'The Discourse of World Music', Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds.): *Western Music and Its Others* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), pp.305-322.

³¹ Wilfred Raussert: 'Introduction: Traveling Sounds: Music, Migration and Identity Formation', Raussert and John Miller Jones (eds.): *Traveling Sounds: Music, Migration and Identity in the U.S. and Beyond* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), p.12.

³² Jocelyne Guilbault – 'On Redefining the "Local" Through World Music', Jennifer C. Post (ed.): *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.142.

America don't go and buy anything out of that section'³³. He has not only commercial reasons to shun it, however, but also artistic and moral ones, describing it as a 'racist marketing term', and adding that 'everything that's not English-speaking is basically considered to be "world music": look at all those guys in funny hats who play on one string, or whatever, which damages a lot of artists' careers.'³⁴

However, according to Hütz, musicians like Shantel and Goran Bregović, who appropriate 'gypsy' music in order to market their own styles, should be included in the world music section. This might indicate that he believes that there is a place for world music, rather than favouring the abolition of the term, although it may simply be a way of expressing his contempt for the artists he mentions. But, of course, Gogol Bordello's work can equally be thought of as an appropriation of 'gypsy' music, which would leave them susceptible to being termed world music. In fact, Gogol Bordello can generally be found amongst the rock and pop in most music stores, but their cultural influences are far wider than those of most other bands who are given the same categorisation in the shops. This suggests that it will be helpful to think of them as part of another designation, one which is more specific than 'rock' or 'pop', less specific than 'Gypsy Punk' and more accurate than 'world music'. I therefore propose the idea of immigrant music.

This term is applicable not only to forms of music that have been designated world music, but also to some forms regarded as 'gypsy' music. As we discussed in Chapter Two, a diverse number of musical styles have been grouped under the 'gypsy' music umbrella. Since the Roma are a diasporic people, the music that is associated with them might logically be regarded as immigrant music, but bands like Fanfare Ciocărlia and Taraf de Haïdouks cannot easily be regarded as immigrant music, since they function within a form that is deeply rooted in a single region, the Balkans. Forms like Balkan Beats and Gypsy Punk, however, which have obvious migratory connections can comfortably be described as immigrant music – more comfortably, in fact, than they might be described as 'gypsy' music.

³³ Deanne Sole: 'Kids Don't Go and Buy Anything Out of This Section: World Music 2007', *PopMatters.com* <<http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/kids-dont-go-and-buy-anything-out-of-this-section-world-music-2007>>

³⁴ 'Eugene Hütz from Gogol Bordello – press conference', *YouTube*, 14 May 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdZVUAqjEos&feature=giv#>>

Bands like Balkan Beat Box and Gogol Bordello have ties to diverse locations and layer different forms of music. These are characteristics described by Raussert when he discusses the many styles that can be found in contemporary American music:

Tracing the migration of sounds, we see American music at home and abroad as an intricate part of a historical process of globalization and as embedded in complex and multidirectional processes of exchange and transformation. We understand the migration of American forms of music not as a one-dimensional homogenizing process of Americanization but rather as a multidirectional journey with diverse and multi-layered forms of music emerging in different and shifting locales.³⁵

This view of music shifting between spaces in any number of ways is reminiscent of the movements of immigrants, which we have already briefly considered. As such, we can think of Gogol Bordello's work as being a kind of immigrant music, a form which has come about as a result of movements between and across borders, genres and styles. This is a more appropriate term than world music or 'gypsy' music and one which is more suited to discussions about popular music. It is interesting that in George Lipsitz's book *Footsteps in the Dark*, which addresses how certain pop songs are reflections of cultural and historical changes, many of the primary texts are examples of what could be considered immigrant music. Lipsitz discusses reggae at some length, engaging with its relationship to race issues in America, and also points out here that there was an important connection between Asian immigrants and reggae; many Asians living in the Caribbean became involved in the production of reggae.³⁶ Later, he seeks out musical comments on the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and his main example here is by the Black Eyed Peas, a band which, as he points out, is comprised of 'one Afro-

³⁵ Raussert, p.10.

³⁶ George Lipsitz: *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp.44-46.

Filipino, one Black, one Mexican [...] and one white woman.’³⁷

There are innumerable further producers of immigrant music, of which there is only space here to comment on a few. However is worth engaging with some examples in order to illustrate the different ways in which immigrant music can function. As we will see, immigrant music may engage with either the past or present, though in the case of Gypsy Punk we see an engagement with both. Here, I have selected three bands – Asian Dub Foundation, System of a Down, and Kultur Shock – which I will consider here for their stylistic, thematic and political closeness to Gogol Bordello; that is to say that they are all self-consciously involved in the production of immigrant music. Asian Dub Foundation formed in 1993, having grown out of a community music project in East London. Their sound is multifarious: although their music is essentially a fusion of reggae and hip-hop, there are clearly discernible punk influences. In addition, there influences from Indian music, which reflect the origins of most of the band’s members. Although immigration is not at the forefront of their message in the same way that it is for Gogol Bordello, there is an implied discourse of immigration in Asian Dub Foundation’s work, which appears as a result of the importance placed on race and its musical associations.

Asian Dub Foundation is by no means the only British Asian band producing immigrant music. The increasing prevalence and mainstream acceptance of these acts, and indeed several other forms of British Asian culture, reached a highpoint in the late 1990s.³⁸ In 1998, Asian Dub Foundation and Indian-influenced indie band Cornershop were both shortlisted for the Mercury Music Prize, and the following year Talvin Singh’s blend of tabla playing and drum and bass won him the award for his album *Ok*. Similar bands that emerged at around the same time included Black Star Liner and Fun-Da-Mental. All of these artists operate in a comparable way, appending elements of Asian music to established styles. Significantly, they are all second generation immigrants, who are equally informed by the music of their parents’ homelands, and that of their own countries. While their work generally remains within the parameters of a mainstream genre such as indie rock or hip-hop, there is a tendency to promote the immigrant elements of

³⁷ Lipsitz, p.266.

³⁸ See Rupa Huq: *Beyond Subculture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.35.

the sound. This can be seen in the prominence of 'Asian' in Asian Dub Foundation's name; similarly Cornershop named themselves after the stereotypical workplace of the Asian migrant.

In this fusion, there is evidently a multi-directional attraction that speaks to both migrants and natives. Although Cornershop received a positive critical response for their first few albums, released in the early 1990s, they reached their greatest success in 1998 with the single 'Brimful of Asha'. This song is frequently invoked as an example of immigrant music, so it is notable that, musically, it shows no deviation from the usual sound of British rock. Its elements of Indian culture can be found in its theme and lyrics; the song references Bollywood playback singer Asha Bhosle, and celebrates the use of music in Indian cinema, and the permeation of this film music into wider culture. While this combination of Britpop and Bollywood was embraced by British record buyers, it should be noted that the version of 'Brimful of Asha' that reached number one in the pop charts was a remix by the white British DJ Fatboy Slim, whereas the original version peaked at number 16. This suggests that music from other cultures may hold an appeal beyond the immigrant community, but – as we have seen in Gogol Bordello's Gypsy Punk – that it depends on its amalgamation with music that is more deeply embedded in the culture of the host nation. Nonetheless, the success of Cornershop indicates that there is definite scope for sounds that might otherwise have been associated solely with world music to cross into the mainstream. This is not a new combination – The Beatles famously incorporated elements from Indian music into their later, more experimental, work³⁹ – but it is certainly significant that music written and performed by immigrants is now able to enter the mainstream.

Asian Dub Foundation have achieved less popular success than Cornershop, perhaps because of their more radical approach to creating immigrant music. They maintain a strong political engagement, making outspoken statements about racism and Asian culture, both within and outside of their lyrical material. For example, their song 'Free Satpal Ram' deals with the case of Satpal Ram, a British Asian man who was imprisoned for murder after defending himself against a racist

³⁹ This exchange of cultural influences in fact came full circle when Cornershop recorded a cover version of The Beatles' 'Norwegian Wood', which was sung in Punjabi.

attack by six men. This is comparable to Gogol Bordello's position on Roma rights; both bands use their public positions in order to raise awareness of issues related to migrants and minorities. However, their music is undoubtedly important too. In an article that is largely critical of 'fusion' music, Ivan Hewett says that, 'There are exceptions of course. The very crudity of Asian Dub Foundation's mix of Dance beats and Indian turns of phrase bespeaks a genuine felt experience. The two layers refuse to blend, revealing perhaps more than the musicians intended of their experience as second and third generation immigrants.'⁴⁰ The space between these layers may have alienated some consumers, but it means that the message conveyed by the music is made all the more pertinent.

The growth of this form of immigrant music in the UK has resulted in debate about how the phenomenon will develop, and whether it will come to encompass immigrants from other cultures. Since West Indian migrants in the mid-twentieth century informed punk and, more recently, British Asian music has attracted mainstream interest, it is not illogical to think that there may be immigrant music yet to be heard from more recent waves of migration, particularly those from the East European countries who have joined the EU in the past decade. Graeme Thompson has asked the pertinent question:

Do we have to wait patiently, then, while Britain's substantial new eastern European communities establish roots deep enough to enable them to make their own impact on British music? Or – given the accelerated rate of cultural assimilation these days – perhaps it's happening already, somewhere out there in the eternal now: is there a below-radar Polish ska scene or a Romanian folk-jazz crossover movement ready to break cover any day now?⁴¹

There are in fact an increasing number of Gypsy Punk and Balkan Beats artists and

⁴⁰ Ivan Hewett: 'Guest Editorial: Different Strains', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 142, No. 1876 (Autumn 2001), p.3.

⁴¹ Graeme Thompson: 'Where's the Polish Panjabi MC?', *The Guardian*, 23 August 2007
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2007/aug/23/wheresthepolishpanjabimc>>

events in the UK, as well as in other countries, but whether all of these can be described as immigrant music is open to debate. Although many of the artists involved in producing this music are immigrants, there is a tendency to appeal to balkanism in its marketing and content. Interestingly, a number of non-migrants are involved in Gypsy Punk, whereas this is not the case with Asian influenced rock or hip-hop. This reinforces the fact that there is a definite exoticism of the Balkans and of the Roma, which results in a less straightforward form of immigrant music. Immigrant music that draws on 'gypsy' music or the music of the Balkans may not actually be produced by immigrants; whether or not this can legitimately be described as immigrant music is open to debate.

For other musicians from migrant backgrounds, cultural origins appear to be less important. American metal band System of a Down are of Armenian descent, but this is not immediately apparent from their music, which is firmly rooted within a tradition that has evolved in Western music. But closer examination of their work reveals that there are traces of Armenia to be found. On one hand, these are musical connections, such as harmonies that call to mind the music of the Middle East. In addition, there are lyrics that explore the histories of the ancestors of the band's members; specifically, references to the Armenian genocide that occurred in Turkey while the First World War raged in Europe. Their 1998 song 'P.L.U.C.K.' explicitly deals with the genocide, and there is a dedication to its victims in the booklet accompanying the self-titled album on which this track appears. System of a Down's interest in the genocide can also be seen in comments and statements intended to raise awareness of it; for example, they have called upon the US government to recognise and commemorate it.⁴²

As was the case with Asian Dub Foundation's song 'Free Satpal Ram', this kind of engagement with an issue calls to mind Gogol Bordello's involvement with Roma rights, and it is for this reason that these two bands with quite different sounds can be considered to be similar as producers of immigrant music. System of a Down do not identify themselves as an immigrant band in the same way that Gogol Bordello do; however, their Armenian heritage is certainly important. The disparity in the backgrounds of Gogol Bordello's members means that 'immigrant'

⁴² See Carla Garapedian's documentary *Screamers* (2006).

is the most useful designation to describe them, but since all of the musicians in System of a Down are from the same background, it may be preferable to identify them through this common background. Nonetheless, their engagement with the immigrant backgrounds of their families, and the presence of this in their work, means that it is fair to describe them as an immigrant band. In their discussion of the Armenian genocide, an overwhelming act of oppression and marginalisation, we are reminded of the treatment that migrants frequently receive. The slaughter of Armenians in Turkey demonstrates the ultimate result of being displaced from one's own country. The fact that System of a Down choose to engage with this event therefore marks them out not only as a group concerned with their history, but also as an immigrant band. They are both American and un-American, and embody the figure of the 'immerican'.

Another 'immerican' group, based in America and playing immigrant music, is Kultur Shock, who have been described as sounding like a cross between System of a Down and Gogol Bordello.⁴³ They formed in Seattle in the late 1990s and, like Gogol Bordello, explicitly present themselves as a band of immigrants. Their music has often been classified as Gypsy Punk, a reasonable description, since they are perhaps closer in style and sound to Gogol Bordello than any other American band. Although they are less diverse in their membership than Gogol Bordello – they have a Bosnian and a Bulgarian amongst their number, along with one Japanese member, but half of their lineup was born in America – they aim to convey the immigrant experience in their work. Kultur Shock are therefore an immigrant band in their message as much as, or perhaps even more than, they are in their makeup. The titles of their albums form a trajectory that reflects the experience of immigration. *Kultura-Diktatura* (2004) has connotations of foreign languages and the oppressive regimes of far-flung lands, much like some of Gogol Bordello's early work. *We Came to Take Your Jobs Away* (2006) uses the ironic appropriation of negative stereotypes about immigrants, conveying the difficulties of living as a migrant. By 2009, Kultur Shock felt ready to release a record entitled *Integration*; on their website they state that 'After ten years, we're naming our new album what

⁴³ Jeremy M. Barker: 'Get Out Saturday: Kultur Shock @ Chop Suey', *Seattlest*, 17 January 2008.

we should have named our first one'⁴⁴.

Despite this name, the album portrays immigrants as being outside of mainstream culture; Kultur Shock certainly do not appear to have integrated themselves into mainstream music with this record. As with Gogol Bordello, the sound is a combination of punk rock and Balkan and gypsy music styles, and the lyrics of many of their songs deal directly with being an immigrant. Lines include, 'You need to integrate so they can tolerate you', in the song 'Guerrilla', and there is also frequent usage of languages other than English. The immigrant that Kultur Shock present therefore seems to be a figure who has not integrated, and the title of *Integration* thus comes across as being as ironic as *We Came to Take Your Jobs Away*. We may recall Gogol Bordello's 'Avenue B' here, but while that song portrays a migrant who has chosen not to integrate, it seems that in Kultur Shock's work we are dealing with an immigrant who has not had the opportunity to do so. This is an interesting contrast, considering that when the backgrounds of their respective musicians are borne in mind, Gogol Bordello is more of an 'immigrant' band.

As we can see from the examples covered here, immigrant music can operate in any of several different ways. This may depend on whether the musicians are first or second generation migrants, and on whether or not their audience consists largely of immigrants. In the case of Asian Dub Foundation we see an engagement with the recent immigrant past by second generation immigrants, while System of a Down evoke a pre-migratory history. Kultur Shock, meanwhile, connect themselves with immediate immigrant experiences. Gogol Bordello's Gypsy Punk is significant as an immigrant music because its mythology raises questions about the recent past, more distant histories (such as the history of the Romani people) and the contemporary immigrant experience. It is also worth pointing out that immigrant music often takes a more prominent political stance than indigenous forms of music: however, immigrant musicians may engage either with issues pertaining to their country of origin, or with the immigrant experience itself. While Gogol Bordello do deal with the experience of migrants in their work, their political focus is more multifaceted. This is because they engage

⁴⁴ 'About Kultur Shock', *Kultur Shock website* <<http://www.kulturshock.com/band.html>>

with not only the immigrant experience in New York, but also with issues related to the Roma. Since the Roma are not directly linked with any particular location, Gogol Bordello's work does not have the specific geographical roots characteristic of much immigrant music. Consequently, Gypsy Punk has greater potential for mythologisation: having come together in America, Gogol Bordello might be an 'immerican' band, but their frame of reference, and thus their engagement with myth, is even broader than that of most immigrant musicians.

AN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

For many immigrants arriving in America, the Lower East Side might have been the initial settling point, but it was not their very first destination. Before they reached Manhattan they had to go through the immigration station. The first of these to be established was Castle Garden, located in Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan; in 1892 it was superseded by Ellis Island, which has since become an enduring symbol of the migrant's arrival in America, and is now a destination for tourists rather than for immigrants. Lawrence J. Epstein recounts the process of physical examination that new arrivals had to go through at Ellis Island:

Collars were unbuttoned so that doctors, in their crisp blue uniforms, could look for lumps on the neck, indicating goiter. The ears were checked and then the back. The worst part of the exam involved the eyes. Inspectors used a buttonhook to flip the eyelid up to search for signs of trachoma. The medical examiners looked for irregular breathing and, with long experience, sought out the mentally ill who made unusual facial expressions.⁴⁵

This description calls to mind Gogol Bordello's song 'I Would Never Wanna Be Young Again', in which a migrant who has settled in the USA describes the experience of arrival, declaring that 'After getting checked for fleas / and

⁴⁵ Lawrence J. Epstein: *At the Edge of a Dream: The Story of Jewish Immigrants on New York's Lower East Side 1880-1920* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2007), p.35.

barricades of embassies / I would never never never never wanna be young again.’ Of course, Eugene Hütz arrived in America by plane in the 1990s, rather than by boat one hundred years before. He did not go through Ellis Island – which is portrayed as ‘Crisis Island’ in the lyrics – and would not have undergone the kind of intimate inspection detailed by Epstein. This is therefore an instance of the mythologised Lower East Side being deployed. The experience described is a difficult one; the process of immigration is shown to be both physically demanding and bureaucratically difficult, with medical examinations and embassies to endure. Indeed, the bureaucracy of ‘barricades of embassies’ reflects the tribulations of border guards that were described in Gogol Bordello’s earlier work, where the mythologised location was not the Lower East Side but the fictional Balkan country of Hützovina. ‘I Would Never Wanna Be Young Again’ is a particularly frenetic song, which reflects not only the unpredictable movements of migration, but also the chaotic colour of the mythologised Lower East Side. There are screams from the backing vocalists that suggest horror; in live renditions of the song Hütz simulates throttling and assaulting the backing singers, as though this is the reason for their screaming. This element of performance recalls the early theatrical shows that Gogol Bordello put on in the Lower East Side, in which Hütz was bound up in microphone cables and assaulted himself with cigarettes in a manner reminiscent of the artists of the first wave of punk.

‘I Would Never Wanna Be Young Again’ describes not only the immediate experiences of the migrant, but also traces the process of going from immigrant worker to immigrant musician, having ‘learned to make marching drums from a fish can’. This trajectory can also be found in the less frantic ‘Immigrant Punk’. The figure of the unassimilated immigrant, which we encountered in the song ‘Avenue B’ in Chapter Five, is also present here: ‘Despite living in the USA / I’m still holding up in all my ways.’ More singular is the claim that ‘We immigrants just wanna sing all night long / Don’t you know that singing salves the troubled soul.’ This is interesting in terms of the mythologies that Gogol Bordello produce: in the same way that they have created a representation of the Balkans and of the Romani people that takes pre-existing perceptions and embellishes them, they have incorporated perceptions of immigrants in America into their figure of the

‘immigrant punk.’ Gogol Bordello’s immigrant figure has the same kind of taxing life as the persecuted Rom or the inhabitants of the unforgiving landscape of Hütsovina, and alleviates his hardship with music. This is a reflection of the fact that migrants are often associated with music in the same way that ‘gypsies’ are. Ronald Takaki’s history of multicultural America, which chronicles the arrivals of many different waves of immigrants from all over the world, includes frequent extracts from the songs sung by migrants. For example, he cites a lullaby sung by an East European Jewish woman to her child, which includes the lines, ‘America is for everyone / They say, it’s the greatest piece of luck / For Jews, it’s a garden of Eden / A rare and precious place’⁴⁶. There is in fact a lengthy history of music that deals with the process of immigration, and Gypsy Punk can be considered a recent manifestation of this.

As for the musicians who make up Gogol Bordello, each of them has a different immigrant experience. The fact that several diverse nationalities are represented by the band’s members means that Gypsy Punk is presented as a global form, but when each musician is considered individually the composite of the band can be better understood. Crucially, the immigrant histories of many of Gogol Bordello’s personnel have been mythologised in order to reinforce the presentation of Gypsy Punk as an immigrant music. Hütz and his colleagues Sergey Ryabtsev and Yuri Lemeshev take centre stage in the band both as musicians and immigrants. Ryabtsev’s violin and Lemeshev’s accordion provide the melodic parts that mark out Gogol Bordello’s work as Gypsy Punk, while their country of birth is important to the band’s mythology. Hütz is a Ukrainian, and Ryabtsev and Lemeshev are Russian immigrants to America; they are therefore typical of the mythologised residents of the Lower East Side. Hütz’s heavily accented singing, which is sometimes supported by Ryabtsev’s even more thickly accented backing vocals, calls to mind this imagined immigrant community. Israeli guitarist Oren Kaplan is less of a caricatured figure than the Russian musicians but his origins nonetheless evoke the Jewish immigrants in the Lower East Side. Gogol Bordello’s association with Jewish migrants and their music has in the past been more pronounced – their former saxophonist Ori Kaplan and their first bassist Rea

⁴⁶ Cited in Ronald Takaki: *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), p.265.

Mochiach were also Israeli – and this means that there is a Jewish legacy of sorts in their work.

Their current bassist, Thomas Gobena, is Ethiopian, and further removed from New York – he migrated to Washington DC, the city that is home to America's largest Ethiopian community, in 1987. Gobena's role in the immigrant mythology that Gogol Bordello create is therefore to provide associations from beyond the Lower East Side, and his nationality certainly contributes to this. While the Lower East Side connotes punk and immigration, Ethiopia has links with reggae. Ethiopia's last emperor Haile Selassie is worshipped as a messiah by followers of the Rastafari movement, which became better known globally due to the popularity of reggae. As a result, Ethiopia and reggae are often thought to be part of the same culture, and the mythologisation of reggae often includes elements from Rastafarianism. As we have already established, there are significant ties between reggae and punk, and so it seems appropriate to the mythology of an immigrant punk band that they should include an Ethiopian musician. Gobena also brings the music of Ethiopia itself to Gogol Bordello, most noticeably in the lines of the 2010 song 'Rise the Knowledge' that he sings in Amharic.

Although Gogol Bordello present themselves as a band made up of immigrants, not all of its members are first generation migrants. However, like almost all Americans, they have ancestors who were. Neither of the two drummers who have played with the band was born outside of the USA, but their immigrant ancestries are foregrounded in promotional materials. According to his profile on the band's website, Oliver Charles, who began drumming with Gogol Bordello in 2009, has an Italian-Swedish mother while his father is from Trinidad and Tobago. His predecessor, Eliot Ferguson, was described as half-German, half-American. It is apparent from the way that these American-born band-members are presented that Gogol Bordello are not only drawing on mythologies associated with immigration, but also mythologising the immigrant pasts of their personnel in order to strengthen their image as immigrant punks. A slightly different means of mythologisation has been applied to the backing dancers Pamela Racine and Elizabeth Sun. Racine, who was a member of Gogol Bordello until 2010, has a Thai mother and an American father, while Sun has Hong Kong Chinese ancestry.

However, while Racine was born in Vermont and moved to New York at the same time as Hütz, Sun grew up in Scotland and did not migrate to America until 1999. It is noteworthy that Sun's profile on the website makes no mention of her birthplace – only her family ethnicity and date of arrival in the USA are stated. The intimation here is that she moved directly from Hong Kong, and she is thus exoticised.

Finally, the case of Gogol Bordello's MC and percussionist Pedro Erazo is different again. Born in Ecuador, he migrated to New York in 1995, and joined Gogol Bordello in 2007, having already featured as a guest musician on *Gypsy Punks* in 2005. However, he was not able to tour with the band outside of the USA until 2009, when he finally obtained the necessary visas. Much was made of his new-found freedom of movement, and his contributions to the band became far more significant, as the 2010 album *Trans-Continental Hustle* demonstrates. Details of Erazo's status prior to his receipt of a visa remained unclear, leading to speculation that he may have been an illegal immigrant. His visa issues were something that Gogol Bordello have been able to incorporate into their mythologies: in a band comprised of immigrants, who sing about the travails of migration and who declare, in the video for the 2010 single 'Immigraniada', that 'no human being is illegal', it is certainly fitting that one of the members should have restrictions on his movement due to his status as an immigrant.

In addition to their combined multi-ethnicity, the different motivations for migration that have informed the members of Gogol Bordello also contribute to their diversity. Hütz's narrative of migration, which we have already partially examined, is the best known. Leaving Ukraine after the Chernobyl disaster, he lived in several European countries, before moving to Vermont as a refugee and subsequently relocating to New York. After his arrival in the USA, he was stateless for seven years.⁴⁷ Although New York and Ukraine are both particularly important to Gogol Bordello's music, as we have seen, the numerous stopping off points have also been influential. This is apparent in *Gypsy Punks*, which can be read as an album about the immigrant experience. For example, the song 'Santa Marinella', which Hütz sings in a mixture of Russian and Italian, draws on and describes his

⁴⁷ Cooper, Ryan: 'An Interview with Eugene Hütz of Gogol Bordello: Talking About the Gypsy Punk Revolution', *About.com* <<http://punkmusic.about.com/od/interviews/a/Eugenehutz.htm>>

time living in Italy. Santa Marinella is a coastal town close to Rome's port of Civitavecchia, and is comparable to the Lower East Side as a place where immigrants have convened after their arrival in a new country. When Hütz arrived in America, the Lower East Side was not his first home there, although he would later live there. This is a reflection of the new changes in the process of migration enabled by advances in technology and the enhanced ease of movement of the postmodern age. Whereas Ellis Island was geographically the first point reached by immigrants who travelled by boat, those who arrive by plane can travel directly to other regions of the USA. This means that Hütz's movement from Vermont is an inversion of the journeys that early twentieth century Jewish immigrants made from New York to other states.

Of course, Hütz's relocation from Vermont to New York had a very different motive from his migration from Eastern Europe. Whereas his initial move was made with his family, and as a refugee, his migration within the USA was made for artistic reasons. This means that he is comparable with the hippies, artists and musicians who made up the East Village community in the 1960s. As we have discussed, these countercultural participants had much in common with the immigrants who arrived in the Lower East Side around the beginning of the twentieth century. Hütz's move to New York can therefore be compared with both of these migratory traditions. An alternative narrative of migration is exemplified by Ryabtsev, who was an actor and theatrical director in Russia prior to his move to the USA. He first arrived in America to attend a conference in Connecticut, and ended up remaining in the USA, settling in the Russian community in Brighton Beach. It was there that he began to make his living as a violinist – although he had undergone classical training in Russia, he had chosen not to play professionally there.⁴⁸ If Ryabtsev's move to America was not intended to be permanent, then it is difficult to define the point at which he became an immigrant. This would presumably be the point at which his residence in the USA became established, but, as is the case with many migrants, it is not easy to determine exactly when this was.

⁴⁸ Dmitry Kiper: Interview with Sergey Ryabtsev, *Echoes of the Land*, 14 November 2007
<<http://echoesoftheland.blogspot.com/2007/11/interview-with-sergey-ryabtsev.html>>

It is apparent from the backgrounds and movements of Gogol Bordello's members that their diversity, not only in their origins but also in the experience of migration, is crucial to their embodiment of an immigrant community. We have already considered Gypsy Punk as the soundtrack to the multicultural Lower East Side; it might also be thought of as a form of music that is intended to evoke immigration on a global level. This is not a form of music that is confined to one place; it is as connected to the process of movement that is part of migration as it is to the places that immigrants have come from and those that they travel to. In addition, it allows for further movements. Since 2008, Hütz has been living in Rio de Janeiro. While the style of *Gypsy Punks* was informed by New York and its history as a destination for migrants, and its 2007 follow-up *Super Taranta* was influenced by the Italian style of Tarantella and Hütz's visits to the Carpathian region of Ukraine, in *Trans-Continental Hustle*, which was released in 2010, there are sounds clearly derived from Brazilian and Latin music, such as the frevo music of Pernambuco. A Brazilian influence is also apparent in the Portuguese lyrics of 'Uma Menina' and the accounts of conflict in Rio de Janeiro's favelas in the lyrics of 'When Universes Collide', yet the immigrant experience remains a constant throughout. The title, *Trans-Continental Hustle*, is a reference to the movement across continents from Asia through Europe and on to the Americas made by the Roma. However, it also alludes to the movements made by other groups of immigrants. For example, 'Immigraniada' includes the refrain 'We're coming rougher every time', indicating multiple migrations. Each time the immigrants embodied in Gypsy Punk move to a new destination they arrive in a form that is less smooth and less easy to define.⁴⁹

Gogol Bordello's engagement with immigration has evolved over time, with their frame of reference transcending the Lower East Side. 'Immigraniada' sees the band foregrounding their immigrant personas, as Hütz sings the line 'We're coming rougher every time'. This line indicates not only multiple migrations, but also a

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between smooth and striated space (considered in further detail in the next section of this chapter), stating that it is 'false to define the nomad by movement', as he exists within 'smooth space', which is not demarcated. The immigrant of 'Immigraniada' might be said to exist within a smooth space whilst moving between spaces, but upon arriving in each new destination he begins to occupy a striated space, and thus between functioning in 'smooth space' and 'coming rougher'. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p.420.

reluctance to assimilate, suggesting that each wave of migrants is less deferential to the host nation than the last. Again, the subject matter is the difficult passage of the immigrant, but here the experience is made to seem cyclical. 'All my life I pack-unpack / But man, I got to earn this buck', Hütz sings, as if describing a life of multiple migrations. He goes on to say that 'After efforts of a hero', the immigrant has to 'start again from zero'. As we discussed in Chapter Two, this suggests a series of migrations from which it is difficult for the immigrant to profit. But despite the difficulties described here, the anthemic nature of the song is suggestive of a collective of migrants who will succeed as a group. Indeed, in its use of forms of music from all over the world, Gypsy Punk evokes a combined community of migrants. This is also apparent in the video for 'Immigraniada', in which Gogol Bordello are portrayed engaged in the kind of menial work that is associated with migrant workers. The nationalities of the band members are written in titles within the video, but the tasks they are carrying out, such as washing cars and cleaning dishes, are similar. At the video's climax, the musicians come together to play as a band, and a sense of immigrant community is created.

Speaking about the more recent sound of Gogol Bordello, Hütz has said, 'We create a raw and spontaneous East European party with the fantasy of what it would be like if our family wasn't only Ukrainian, but what if it was also Brazilian? What if it was African?'⁵⁰ This is in fact not a fantasy at all; if the family metaphor is taken to refer to Gogol Bordello then the band is by no means only Ukrainian, since Hütz is the sole member with origins there. However, his comment does locate Eastern Europe as the central point around which their other influences radiate. This is significant since it is from Eastern Europe that Hütz made his initial migration, and marks a definite homeland in the trajectory of immigration that Gogol Bordello present. In Gypsy Punk we can see a motion in which the homelands left behind in the past open out into new homelands and the future. Such new homelands are created along the migratory path, both figuratively in fictions like Hützovina and literally in the immigrant communities that develop.

⁵⁰ Ben Kaplan: Gogol Bordello rocks, rude-boy Ukrainian-style'. *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 April 2010
 <<http://www2.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/artslife/story.html?id=5a6538d1-d1b5-4696-b0a1-1dfe66efb49f>>

An immigrant community of this kind, which is multicultural and which has the potential to be fragmented or reshaped by further onward migrations, is difficult to define in concrete terms, in contrast to more established communities. One strategy for understanding such communities might therefore be to think of them as 'imagined communities', as introduced in Benedict Anderson's oft-cited book of that title, in which he proposes that the nation is an 'imagined political community'⁵¹. While his thesis is largely concerned with nationalism, he considers religion as one of the antecedents of nationalism, as something that causes people to imagine themselves as united in some way, and this is a notion that can be extended to describe the communities of immigrants who are connected by the place they have arrived in. Anderson writes:

The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kaaba must, as it were, ask himself: 'Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the some words that I am uttering, even though we can not talk to one another?' There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: 'Because *we...* are Muslims.'⁵²

He goes on transfer this sentiment to the idea of nationhood, and indeed, 'Muslims' might be replaced with 'British' or 'Americans' or 'Ukrainians' in a similar context. However, this might also be utilised in a context that challenges the idea of a nation comprised of one people: 'Because *we...* are immigrants'. The commonality of the immigrant experience can be used as an identifier that, while perhaps not quite on a par with the imagined communities that stem from a common race or religion, connects immigrants in a particular community of their own. It is true that the figure of the immigrant, who has relocated from one country to another, is dependent on the existence of nations. But the unity of immigrants that this statement would imply goes against the concept of the nation as a place where different groups of people categorise themselves as being the same. The immigrant is resolutely not the same; he or she is always somewhat removed from the imagined community of the nation. This may not be a position that the

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), p.6.

⁵² Anderson, p.54.

immigrant has chosen to adopt, but it is nonetheless the position which they come to inhabit. Even when immigrants have settled and assimilated, like the Lower East Side Jews who left Manhattan for the opportunities afforded by the rest of the USA, they generally retain this status. Their children may be able to become part of the imagined community of the nation, but first generation migrants, with their foreign accents and unfamiliar customs, invariably remain outside of it. Anderson's imagined communities are based on groups of people who are the same; the imagined community of immigrants is based on a sense of difference, but it is a common difference. Outside of communities based on similarity, immigrant communities are less constrained, and Gogol Bordello draw attention to this in their work.

The notion of a flexible imagined community is introduced in a lyric from the song 'Through the Roof 'n' Underground'. In Chapter Three we considered this song as a criticism of globalisation; however, the idea of going through the roof or underground is also used as a metaphor for escaping the strict delineations of countries and cultures. This is apparent from the line, 'Just as the meanings lay between the lines / Between the borders there real countries hide'. This is an ambiguous lyric; at first it might sound very literal, since countries do exist between borders. However, the 'real countries' are described as though they are concealed by borders. On one level, this could indicate impenetrable borders; this recalls the difficult border crossings described in songs like 'Passport' and 'Occurrence on the Border'. But it also suggests that the presence of borders obscures the authentic distributions of races and communities, such as the Roma. Hütz has also described his own spatial location as an immigrant as being very flexible, saying, 'I'm building my triangle of Ukraine, New York, Rio. Those are all places where I have a really strong connection and lots of friends and where I have a lot of cultural interests to explore.'⁵³ This seems to describe a new model of immigration and inhabitation that draws on more abstract ideas of community and space, and which is referred to throughout Gogol Bordello's work.

Similarly abstract ideas of space and community are at play in the work of the Slovenian art collective NSK, which we examined in Chapter Six. The NSK State

⁵³ Robert Rigney: 'Interview: Eugene Hütz, *Exberliner Magazine*, 1 June 2010
<<http://www.exberliner.com/articles/interview-eugene-htz>>

in Time is almost literally an imagined community: explaining how it functions, members of its visual art wing IRWIN have written, 'NSK confers the status of a state not upon territory but upon the mind, whose borders are in a state of flux, in accordance with the movements and changes of its symbolic and physical collective body'.⁵⁴ Having compared the NSK State in Time with Hützovina, we are aware that Gogol Bordello's mythologies functions different to NSK's, but the notion of a community whose borders are in flux is applicable both to the mythologised places in Gogol Bordello's work, and to the actual places occupied by immigrants. In Chapter Five we introduced the figure of the 'immerican'. In the same way that borders are in flux in NSK's State in Time and in Gogol Bordello's Hützovina, the word 'immerican' indicates a figure who is in flux, being both American and un-American. We now move on to consider the distinctions between several other terminologies that can be used to describe immigrants, in order to determine the kind of immigrant represented in Gypsy Punk.

IMMIGRANTS, MIGRANTS AND NOMADS

The differences between an immigrant and an emigrant are clear. Where an immigrant enters into a place, an emigrant leaves a place. The two terms are of course interrelated: they are generally embodied in a single person moving from one place to another, who is an emigrant upon leaving their starting point, and who becomes an immigrant upon arriving at their destination. While Gogol Bordello are certainly connected closely with the discourse of migration of which emigrants and immigrants are a product, the extent of their mythology and their engagement with the Roma (whose movements are also mythologised extensively) mean that these two terms will not suffice as we consider migration in the context of Gypsy Punk.

Firstly, it is necessary to consider the role of the migrant in this discourse. The word 'migrant' is clearly connected closely with 'immigrant' and 'emigrant', but some of its connotations are quite different. The *OED* defines an immigrant as

⁵⁴ Eda Čufer and IRWIN: 'NSK State in Time', Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl (eds.): *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), p.301.

'one who migrates into a country as a settler'⁵⁵, while an emigrant is defined as 'One who removes from his own land to settle (permanently) in another'⁵⁶. The most significant points that can be drawn out from these definitions are the importance of nations in the discourse of migration, which typically entails a movement from one country to another; and the permanence of the movement. In the *OED*, a migrant is said to be 'A person who moves temporarily or seasonally from place to place; a person on a journey'⁵⁷. This contrasts with the way that both 'immigrant' and 'emigrant' are defined, as it connotes no sense of permanence and thus cannot be applied to an immigrant or emigrant. But, I would argue, there is a space between emigrant and immigrant – between the point of leaving one land and the point of arrival at another – that seems to be best filled by the term 'migrant'. The questions provoked here concern the point at which an emigrant becomes a migrant and, similarly, when a migrant becomes an immigrant. Although it is difficult to answer concretely, it would seem that the migrant is en route, between one point and another, and between the state of being an emigrant and that of being an immigrant.

However, the figure of the migrant has been employed beyond the immediate context of migration between nations. Sarah Ahmed has noted that:

migration is employed as a metaphor within contemporary critical theory for movement and dislocation, and the crossing of borders and boundaries. Such a generalisation of the meaning of migration allows it to be celebrated as a transgressive and liberating departure from living-as-usual in which identity (the subject as and at home) is rendered impossible.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ 'immigrant', n, The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/91896>>

⁵⁶ 'emigrant', n, The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/61169>>

⁵⁷ 'migrant', n, The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. 1989, OED Online, Oxford University Press <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/118321>>

⁵⁸ Sara Ahmed: *Strange Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.80.

Ahmed goes on to describe how, in Iain Chambers' work, the nature of identity is engaged with through migration.⁵⁹ She writes, 'Migration is one journey amongst a number of journeys that involve the crossing of borders: the migrant, *like* the exile and the nomad, crosses borders and breaks barriers of thought and experience.'⁶⁰ For Chambers, the nomad is comparable with the migrant as a figure that crosses borders: this contrasts with the view of Deleuze and Guattari, who differentiate between the movement of the two, and whose ideas are more applicable to the subjects of Gypsy Punk.

In their work on nomadology, Deleuze and Guattari write that 'The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen or not well localized.'⁶¹ This conflicts with the idea that a migrant is someone who moves around on a seasonal or in a temporary pattern. For Deleuze and Guattari, this kind of movement is more typical of the nomad than the migrant. While many definitions of the migrant would allow for multiple movements, this particular classification restricts the migrant to a single movement. The migrant goes from one place to a second; a human migrant who travels through several places is, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, a nomad: 'the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory.'⁶² This may be a useful distinction for considering the immigrants who are the producers and subjects of Gypsy Punk. While some members of Gogol Bordello can be considered migrants in these terms, others, including Hütz, would be defined as nomads. Moreover, the constant movement of the touring band means that they are continually moving from place to place, and thus come to have a nomadic lifestyle.

We have already seen that for the immigrant and emigrant the origin country or homeland is important. For the nomad this cannot be the case. Even if we apply this use of nomadology to the notion of imaginary homelands, we may seem to come to an impasse. The nomad might have a territory, but he is without a

⁵⁹ Iain Chambers: *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁶⁰ Ahmed, p.80.

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p.419.

⁶² Deleuze and Guattari, p.419.

homeland, having a trajectory rather than a fixed origin, so a nomadic artist has no fixed past to recall and re-imagine. However, he will have the trajectory of his past, as we see in the case of Hütz. This suggests that the nomad will have not just one imaginary homeland, but several, or perhaps a composite homeland that is made up of several past stopping places. Since the nomad is less deeply rooted in the points along his path than the migrant is in his homeland, the imaginary homeland of the nomad is likely to be more indistinct. It is arguable that a nomad is intrinsically without a homeland, and while this does not prevent him from creating an imaginary homeland – Hützovina could be seen as the imaginary homeland of a nomad – it means that there is no actual homeland that can inform the imaginary homeland and lend it finer nuances.

Nevertheless, the points along the nomad's path remain important; more important, according to Deleuze and Guattari, than the process of movement:

sedentary space is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomad space is smooth, marked only by "traits" that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory. [...] The nomad distributes himself in a smooth space; he occupies, inhabits, holds that space; this is his territorial principle. It is therefore false to define the nomad by movement.⁶³

The interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari is that the nomad does not move, since movement is defined in relation to sedentary space, whereas the nomad exists within smooth space. But if the nomad cannot be defined by movement yet is not fixed to any one place, it might seem problematic to locate this figure. However, nomads are not completely detached from places: Deleuze and Guattari describe them as 'vectors of deterritorialization'⁶⁴ when discussing their spaceless transience, and suggest that they inform the places they occupy. We have already considered some of the places that contribute to the mythology of Gypsy Punk, and if we readdress these, we may find that they are fitting spaces for placeless people. The two main locations that we have examined are the Balkans and New York's

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, p.420.

⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, p.421.

Lower East Side and, as we have already seen, there are similarities between the two in the ways that they have been mythologised. We can find a further similarity in the ways that the physical locations of these places relate to the imagined locations that come about through perceptions of them.

As we know, one of the main characteristics of the Balkans in the eyes of onlookers and visitors from outside the region is its lack of distinguishable borders and countries. The borders of countries in the Balkans have changed frequently during the past century, and there remains a perception that they continue to shift. In addition, the borders of the Balkans as a whole region are not presented as being constant. Simply looking at various maps of the Balkans will reveal this; while most of the formerly Yugoslavian states and Albania are always included, countries such as Turkey, Slovenia and Greece are sometimes considered Balkan but at other times omitted from the region's map. This means that the Balkans are particularly suited to being appropriated as a migrant or transient space, even though in recent years the region has been the locus of widespread emigration. In the case of Hütsovina, we have seen that Hütz has taken advantage of the disparity between the physical Balkans and the mythologised Balkans in order to create an imagined homeland that engages with Western perceptions of the area. His experiences as a migrant who has moved from Eastern Europe to the West have clearly informed this.

The Lower East Side differs from the Balkans in that its space is on a much smaller physical scale, and its parameters therefore have less potential for significant deviations. However, on this localised level, there is a similar uncertainty regarding the exact borders of the area. The East Village designation that arrived in the 1960s has given rise to even less specificity; this has in fact caused the area known as the Lower East Side to reduce in size dramatically as the East Village impinges on its former territory. Although the two neighbourhoods retain the feeling of a composite, guidebooks and other writings about this part of New York vary wildly in where they set the borders of each neighbourhood. This is of course a very different situation to the Balkans. Traditionally, a national or state boundary is the only border that carries a definite weight, or a sense of immovability. The borders of neighbourhoods, cities and even some regions are

much more susceptible to shifts. The definitions of 'immigrant' and 'emigrant', which seemed to require that migration involves movement between countries is a reflection of this. However, it is possible to undergo something very like a migration without crossing any national boundaries. An example here would be the Jewish immigrants who moved on from their initial destination, the Lower East Side, and disseminated themselves more widely throughout the USA.

As populations move around, areas move to accommodate newcomers and alterations in demographic sometimes call for changes to names whose connotations might no longer fit. The case of the Lower East Side shows that its boundaries have shifted as different immigrant groups have come and gone. New names have been given to it by different groups; Puerto Ricans immigrants, for example, dubbed it *Loisaida*. As a migrant space, therefore, it is fluid. If the nomad is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the 'Deterritorialized par excellence'⁶⁵, and a 'vector of deterritorialization'⁶⁶, then the immigrant is a figure who informs the territorialisation of space, informing the limits of territories and areas. On a local level, immigrants appear to cause the composition and boundaries of neighbourhoods to change. However, they may in fact arrive into a space, such as the Lower East Side, which has been pre-mythologised as migrant space. While borders are rarely, if at all, affected on a global level by migration, the cultures of countries can change as a result of migration, particularly as immigrants move within countries. But how long must an immigrant remain in the place to which they have migrated before they cease to be an immigrant? There is no clear-cut answer: it is perhaps by becoming nationalised, or through a process of assimilation.

Gogol Bordello do not attempt to answer this question through their work; instead they engage with the complexity of immigrant status in songs like 'Avenue B' and 'Immigraniada'. 'Avenue B' is sung through the voice of an immigrant who is reluctant to assimilate, while 'Immigraniada' presupposes multiple migrations. For the immigrants who are the subjects of these songs there is therefore no point in sight when they will cease to be immigrants; if we follow the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, then these immigrants might better be described as nomads.

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p.421.

⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p.421.

The immigrant experience is of course only one element in Gogol Bordello's mythology, and questions concerning their representation of immigrants become even more complex when we reconsider other aspects of this mythology. Since one of the defining features of the stereotypical 'gypsy' figure is nomadic movement, the fact that Gogol Bordello identify as a Gypsy Punk band means that any references to immigrant movement in their work will inevitably be associated with the movement of the 'gypsy'.

Although many immigrants have suffered persecution and discrimination, the 'immigrant' has not achieved the same level of misrepresentation as the 'gypsy' or the 'Balkans': both of these designations typically signify something some way removed from what they purport to represent, whereas this is not normally the case with the word 'immigrant'. Indeed, this is another reason why immigrant music is a more suitable way of describing Gypsy Punk than 'gypsy' music: it is a more accurate term without any misleading connotations that may be susceptible to misuse. The immigrant mythology in Gypsy Punk therefore functions differently from the genre's Romani or Balkan mythologies: it is more closely linked to the actual histories and experiences of Gogol Bordello's personnel. There is, however, a similarity in the way that space and particular locations are involved; the space that is occupied by immigrants shares characteristics with that of both the Balkans and the Roma. We have already seen that the exoticised location of the Balkans is comparable with the immigrant destination of the Lower East Side; but the patterns of migration pursued by contemporary immigrants dissociate them from specific places, and cause them to seem more nomadic – and this is of course a characteristic of the stereotypical 'gypsy'. When Gypsy Punk engages with immigration and immigrant culture this engagement is therefore related to its use of both Balkan and 'gypsy' mythologies. Immigrant discourses in Gogol Bordello's work take place against a backdrop comparable with the Gypsy Punk portrayal of the Balkans, while the immigrants themselves are aligned with the Romani people.

An example of this can be seen in the song 'Underdog World Strike', which appears on *Gypsy Punks*, the album in which Gogol Bordello deal most explicitly with the immigrant experience. The song begins with Hütz declaring, 'I'm a foreigner and I'm walking through your streets': the immigrant discourse is thus

introduced immediately. He goes on to say, 'But before I want to I see the same deeds', implying that the things he might have hoped to escape by migration remain present in his life in a new country. The nature of these deeds is clarified in the next lines: 'Inherited by few a power machine / That crushes and strangles you right in your sleep'. The sense of fear and paranoia invoked by these lines recalls the portrayal of the Balkans in Gogol Bordello's earlier work, which dealt with the unwelcoming land of Hützovina. But just as the negative elements of Hützovina – and thus the negative elements associated with the Balkans – were overcome, in this song the 'underdog world strike' serves as a force of resistance. Significantly, the elements that come together to form this 'underdog world strike' are said to be 'connected through the gypsy part of town'. This is a clear signal that in Gypsy Punk the 'gypsy' and the immigrant are closely connected.

In 'Sally', the opening track from *Gypsy Punks*, Hütz sings, 'I ended up being a walking United Nation'. This statement of multinationalism draws attention to the multiple migrations that he has made. Growing up in Ukraine and then living in several other European countries before arriving in America as an immigrant and subsequently moving on to Brazil, he has almost transcended association with any particular country. Although his accent and some of the subjects he refers to in Gogol Bordello's lyrics may mark him out as Russian or East European, he also seems to be product of New York and, more recently, of Rio de Janeiro. In addition, there are the 'gypsy' characteristics that he often seems keen to foreground. Although he is only a quarter Romani, this element of his background is evidently very important to him, and it is perhaps because of his continual movement that he has felt the need to stress his 'gypsiness'. In Hütz, we see the figure of the 'gypsy' acting as a stand-in for the immigrant. Some of the traits associated with the 'gypsy' are assigned to the immigrant so that recent patterns of migration can be understood. Although 'gypsy' and 'immigrant' may seem to clash in Gypsy Punk, the overall result is that immigrant communities and the Roma can both be considered more objectively on their own terms.

GYPSY PUNK AS IMMIGRANT MUSIC

Although immigrants and the Roma are portrayed in Gypsy Punk as distinct figures, each with their own experiences and mythologies, it is important to remember that outside of Gypsy Punk, the two groups are often regarded as a homogenous unit – as ‘others’ or ‘strangers’. Adriana Helbig draws attention to this when she notes that:

In American popular culture, an immigrant is culturally identified as a person who speaks, acts, and socially engages others in ways that are often based on values that allegedly differ from the status quo. This amalgamation of characteristics does not fall far away from popular perceptions of Gypsies as people who have historically been marginalized and ostracized by majority populations due to cultural differences as well. The immigrant, like the Gypsy, is rejected socially but embraced culturally, a lure of the foreign and exotic, one whose cultural offering is consumed but accepted only in certain contexts.⁶⁷

The way in which the stranger is defined is considered by Georg Simmel, when he writes:

The stranger will thus not be considered here in the usual sense of the term, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the man who comes today and stays tomorrow – the potential wanderer, so to speak, who, although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a certain spatial circle – or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries – but his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not

⁶⁷ Adriana Helbig: “‘All Connected Through the Gypsy Part of Town’: The Gypsyfication of East European Immigrant Identity in U.S. Gypsy Punk Music”, *Romano Džaniben*, Winter 2009, p.90.

belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it.⁶⁸

Simmel's understanding of the stranger is particularly pertinent in the context of distinctions between the immigrant and the nomad. What Simmel describes as the 'usual sense of the term' would seem to describe Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the nomad, whereas Simmel's 'potential wanderer' might represent Deleuze and Guattari's migrant. However, in more general terms, immigrants and the Roma are both likely to be regarded as strangers. Simmel's stranger is a person who does not belong initially; however, the history of persecution that has affected the Roma, and the prejudices applied to immigrants indicate that the stranger is in fact perceived as someone who will never belong. Yet Simmel goes on to describe a more complex relationship between the stranger and the more settled inhabitant of a place:

The stranger is close to us insofar as we feel between him and ourselves similarities of nationality or social position, of occupation or of general human nature. He is far from us insofar as these similarities extend beyond him and us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people. [...] As such, the stranger is near and far *at the same time*, as in any relationship based on merely universal similarities. Between these two factors of nearness and distance, however, a peculiar tension arises, since the consciousness of having only the absolutely general in common has exactly the effect of putting a special emphasis on that which is not common.⁶⁹

This is a description that might be applied to two of the stranger figures that we have considered as significant to Gypsy Punk: the 'gypsy' and the immigrant. However, it might also be related to the more broadly imagined nomad. The

⁶⁸ Georg Simmel: 'The Stranger', Simmel: *On Individuality and Social Forces: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p.143.

⁶⁹ Simmel, pp.147-8.

nomad, according to Deleuze and Guattari, moves between points but cannot be defined by movement: therefore the journeys of nomads can be defined only by the locations that they move between.

The 'gypsy' continues to be perceived as a nomadic figure, even though most Romani people no longer lead nomadic lifestyles. However, the journeys of the 'gypsy' are defined by movement – the travels undertaken by 'gypsies' in their caravans are perhaps more important to the narratives in which they appear than the points at which they halt or settle. Therefore the 'gypsy' may in fact be more migrant than nomad. If this figure is not regarded as a nomad, then it is tempting to think of the 'gypsy' as a perpetual migrant, who continually settles in new places, before moving on again and resettling. However, reconsidering Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between migrant and nomad – the migrant goes from one point to another, while 'the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity'⁷⁰ – reveals that this is not quite the case. The 'gypsy', who moves from place to place but who also seems to travel out of habit, might seem to occupy a place between migrant and nomad.

Although the 'gypsy' may not fit neatly into the category of either migrant or nomad, the Roma have the potential to be either, in the same way that immigrants do. This is not to say that all Roma are migrants or nomads, but those who do move between places are now more likely to do so as migrants than they are as nomads. Indeed, the diverse immigrant population of the USA has certainly included Romani migrants. Brian Belton, who has argued that Romani identity in the USA is socially constructed, concedes that ethnically Romani migrants relocated to the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, when migration to America from Europe was in full flow. In addition, he accepts that there may have been Romani migrants who remain unaccounted for: 'Many of those who might otherwise have been understood to be Gypsies described themselves as Russians, Poles, Hungarians, or Serbians, either choosing to cite their nationality rather than a specific ethnicity or actually understanding themselves to be (and others seeing them as) Russian, Polish, and so on.'⁷¹ This places Romani immigrants in the same broadly defined group as the East European Jews who

⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, p.419.

⁷¹ Brian Belton: *Questioning Gypsy Identity* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2005), p.89.

settled in great numbers in the Lower East Side, and means that the Lower East Side is a doubly fitting location for the emergence of Gypsy Punk.

In Gogol Bordello's music, connections between the immigrant and the 'gypsy' are found often. One such connection is apparent in the way that Gogol Bordello use the Romani language when singing about immigrant experiences. We have already considered the 2002 song 'Occurrence on the Border' when we examined the presentation of the Balkans in Gypsy Punk, noting that the use of Romani lyrics invites us to find similarities between the Balkans and the Roma in this song set in the fictional Balkan state of Hützovina. However, this linguistic device also invites us to connect the Roma with immigrants, since the song is about the experience of crossing national borders. The fact that immigrant narrators sing in the Romani language has two purposes: firstly, it is a reminder that contemporary Roma are more likely to be immigrants than nomads, and secondly, it suggests similarities between the experiences of the Roma and those of immigrants.

There are also specific examples in Gogol Bordello's work where the figures of the immigrant and the 'gypsy' are thematically connected. The 2005 'Underdog World Strike', which we considered in the previous chapter, features the refrain 'Be it punk, hip-hop, be it a reggae sound / It is all connected through the gypsy part of town'. The opening line of this song is 'I am a foreigner and I'm walking through new streets'. With this lyrics Hütz clearly establishes himself as an immigrant, yet he goes on to sing about the 'gypsy part of town', and among the sounds that can be heard in this neighbourhood he includes reggae and hip-hop, both genres that have been shaped by immigrant communities. An affinity between the immigrant and the 'gypsy' is therefore established, with the 'gypsy' being presented as the glue that binds together different styles of music. Indeed, the 'gypsy' is used, both here and elsewhere in Gogol Bordello's music, as a symbol for the immigrant, and this is one reason why Gypsy Punk can be described as an immigrant music rather than a 'gypsy' music, despite its superficial 'gypsiness'.

If the 'gypsy' can be a symbolic of the immigrant, then the differences between migrants and nomads become more blurred still. But if we return to the distinction between migrant and nomad, we recall that migration has become less

simple to define than it might have been in the past, and that migrant space – as in the example of the Lower East Side – is something that is very fluid, and comparable with the ‘smooth space’ of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomad. This indicates that the migrant has taken on the nomadic movements of the ‘gypsy’, though in the case of the contemporary migrant these nomadic movements may take in greater expanses of time or distance. As a result, the figure of the ‘gypsy’ is extremely pertinent to a world in which the movement of people is becoming ever more widespread and taking an increasing number of different paths. It is for this reason that the ‘gypsy’ and the immigrant are so closely associated in Gypsy Punk.

Deleuze and Guattari conclude that ‘the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence’⁷². Whereas the migrant moves from territory to territory, the nomad is completely detached from this pattern of movement, having no territory that they can claim as a starting or finishing point. This means that the traditionally travelling ‘gypsy’ of popular perception is unmistakably nomadic. However, the Romani people who have been sedentarised have also been assigned territories, and therefore any further movement that they make will be migratory rather than nomadic. If the migrant was to continue to move around, this subject would be re-entering the realm of the nomadic. But in order to leave the country that they have been assigned, contemporary Roma need to have passports and, consequently, nationalities. Rather than being nomads, they are now perpetual migrants: people who have been associated with a particular territory, but who choose to disassociate themselves from all territories.

In contemporary patterns of migration we find movement that may be considered more nomadic than migratory, and the immigrant is therefore comparable with the ‘gypsy’. Indeed, this immigrant has come to occupy the same nomadic limbo as the wandering ‘gypsy’, being fully aligned neither with their current location nor their place of origin. But immigrants have always formed communities where they have settled, and the multicultural demographic of the Lower East Side – which includes the descendants of East European Jewish immigrants alongside more recent arrivals from Puerto Rico and China – reveals that these communities need not be comprised of just one ethnic group. The multi-

⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, p.421.

ethnic personnel of Gogol Bordello acts as a microcosm of this kind of community, offering a model in which the status of being an immigrant in a certain place holds more weight than the original homeland of the past. But their prominent involvement with Romani music and culture conflicts with this: for Romani migrants, the status of being Roma is more important than the place in which one lives and the local community that has developed there. There is therefore a disparity in Gypsy Punk between the immigrant community and the 'gypsy' community.

This disparity is overcome through Gogol Bordello's music. As we have seen, the ostensibly 'gypsy' music of Gypsy Punk can more appropriately be regarded as an immigrant music, with the 'gypsy' figure as it is presented in Gogol Bordello's work acting as symbolic of the immigrant. As champions of Roma Rights and producers of immigrant music, Gogol Bordello find themselves responding to Romani issues through a medium that is not directly associated with the Roma. However, the prominent 'gypsy' music elements of their sound ensures that a sense of proximity to Romani culture is manifest in their music. Meanwhile, the actual immigrant experiences of Gogol Bordello's members are also represented effectively. As in Simmel's description of the stranger, universal similarities are apparent, and the immigrant and 'gypsy' figures portrayed in Gogol Bordello's work are made to seem both near and far.

CONCLUSION

When we examined Gogol Bordello's manifesto, the artist's statement they produced for the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2002 biennial, we noted the pronounced opposition to postmodernism that is presented in the document. In the introduction to a recent edition of *Orientalism*, Edward Said has described a consequence of postmodernity which we might also imagine Gogol Bordello standing against:

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is

viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of "the mysterious Orient".⁷³

Said's statement can be related to the freer movement of music that has come about in the postmodern age, with all kinds of music circulating on a global level. Since particular styles of music are no longer confined to specific locations, it has become all the more important for musicians to reinforce any sense of place contained in their work, and this is a challenge that Gogol Bordello rise to in Gypsy Punk. This is perhaps more difficult with 'gypsy' music than with many other styles, since the lack of a single homeland for the Roma means that their music cannot be tied down to an exact location. However, since much of the music that is traditionally thought to be 'gypsy' is rooted in the Balkans, this region, which also shares with Roma a history of stereotyping, is often thought of as the home of 'gypsy' music. With their Balkan-rooted mythologies and use of 'gypsy' music styles, Gogol Bordello may seem initially to be intensifying the association between 'gypsy' and Balkan, and perpetuating stereotypes. But, as we have established, Gypsy Punk is in fact more of an immigrant music than a 'gypsy' music. In addition to its Balkan roots, it is also firmly grounded in New York, which has provided a sense of migrant history, and the 'gypsy' figures in Gogol Bordello's music symbolise immigrants and their experiences. This immigrant music, which is representative of an age in which migration can be carried out more quickly and more easily, is more relevant to contemporary culture than the 'gypsy' music which is based on outmoded and inaccurate ideas.

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, Benedict Anderson has described the nation as an 'imagined political community', and we have subsequently considered the idea of an imagined immigrant community. In Chapter Five, we have also examined the possibility of an imagined Romani community: plans were

⁷³ Edward W. Said: *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.26.

made for the utopian Romanestan, which was more of a notion state than a nation state. Anderson qualifies his description of the imagined community by adding that it is 'imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'⁷⁴ However, the imagined immigrant and 'gypsy' communities we have considered do not fit within this definition, as they are not limited, but are instead fluid and all-encompassing, being dissociated from any one place. The Romani community exists beyond the borders of nation states, while the immigrant community exists within borders but is grounded in a history of transcending these borders. In Gypsy Punk, as we have seen, these two groups come together with one symbolising the other.

Another example of this process can be found in the klezmer punk hybrid played by Golem, who were discussed in the context of immigrant music earlier in this chapter. Although most of the members of Golem are not immigrants, they too have produced music that deals with the migrant experience. Founder and lead singer Annette Ezekiel has said, 'I wanted to write about the modern immigrant experience in New York, but also connect it up to that classic, 19th century, Ellis Island experience that so many Americans' families had.'⁷⁵ This is an interesting premise because, unlike most of Gogol Bordello's members, Ezekiel is not a first generation migrant to the United States. Golem are working with a different set of mythologies to Gogol Bordello, focusing on Jewish immigrant culture rather than dealing with the Roma or the Balkans. The mythologised immigrant location of New York's Lower East Side functions in Golem's music in the same way that the mythologised figure of the 'gypsy' does in Gogol Bordello's, symbolising the immigrant figures portrayed in their music.

But as we are aware, Gogol Bordello's mythology is more complex than this – they construct a mythology of their own from extant mythologies, and the Lower East Side that appears in their work is a version of that neighbourhood that is saturated in mythologies of immigration. This might lead us to question whether the immigrant culture that Gogol Bordello engage with is an authentic one or an invented, mythologised one. However, it is clear from songs like 'I Would Never

⁷⁴ Anderson, p.6.

⁷⁵ Tom Pryor: 'The Nat Geo Music Interview: Golem', *National Geographic*, 2 March 2009
<http://worldmusic.nationalgeographic.com/view/page.basic/article/content.article/golem_interview>

Wanna Be Young Again', which incorporates elements from the nineteenth century immigrant experience into a present day narrative, that the latter is the case. But this does not annul the fact that Gogol Bordello is comprised of people who have had genuine migrant experiences. As I have shown in this thesis, Gogol Bordello's work may be thought of primarily as an immigrant music, but it builds not only on mythologies of immigration, but also on those associated with the Balkans and the 'gypsy' figure. These latter two mythologies have already been considered in depth, but it is necessary to review them briefly in order to fully understand the mythologised form of immigrant culture in Gypsy Punk.

Romani culture has been exoticised from outside, and the results of this practice can be seen in the figure of the 'gypsy', and in the widespread stereotyping that the Roma have been subjected to as a consequence of the popular perceptions of this figure. Beliefs that 'gypsies' are unsanitary criminals, for example, are widely held. The Balkans have also been frequently misrepresented, being regarded as underdeveloped, inhospitable or even dangerous. The lacunae between the actual cultures of the Roma and the Balkans and the ways in which they are perceived are crucial to Gypsy Punk; indeed, it could be said that these are the spaces that Gypsy Punk negotiates and inhabits. However, to describe these lacunae as spaces between the actual and the stereotyped is not sufficient to express the manner in which Gogol Bordello's articulation of Gypsy Punk engages with both; Gogol Bordello's means of engagement is best described as a mythology. This mythology entails both the utilisation and invalidation of misrepresentation; it introduces more considered detail about the Roma and the Balkans alongside stereotypes such as danger and criminality. As such, it risks perpetuating such inaccuracies, but the fact that they are continually debunked means that this is avoided.

The experiences and cultures of immigrants are therefore mythologised in Gypsy Punk without being stereotyped. When Gogol Bordello sing about immigrants sitting in Russian bathhouses in 'Avenue B' or being checked for fleas upon arrival in America in 'I Would Never Wanna Be Young Again', they are describing the situation of present-day migrants while alluding to the history of migration to New York. This history is itself something that has been mythologised

extensively, and the mythologies of Gogol Bordello's work build on this to express the contemporary immigrant experience. In immigrant music, myth serves a particularly important function, as it can be used as a tool that engages with both past and present. Examples of this can be found if we return to some of the immigrant music bands that we considered earlier. Asian Dub Foundation use their music to comment on the situation of contemporary British Asians, as well as broader political concerns. System of a Down are also a political band with concerns in the present, but in addition they allude to the Armenian genocide, which impacted on the immigrant experiences of their families. In Gypsy Punk there is both past and present, whether the figures described are immigrants or Roma. Nineteenth century immigrant experiences such as checks for fleas are juxtaposed with Hütz's more recent recollections, and in the song 'Break The Spell', the history of the Roma, which is tied up inextricably with mythology, is presented alongside accounts of continuing prejudice. As we have established, the 'gypsy' is also used in Gypsy Punk to represent the immigrant, so the immigrant music of Gogol Bordello is layered with both direct and indirect immigrant experiences.

But should the production of immigrant music be confined only to immigrants? Having examined the variation in form that migration can take, we know that what can be thought of as 'immigrant music' is not produced solely by immigrants, but also by migrants and nomads. This broad range can be extended even further, so that the term 'immigrant music' may be applied to forms that are not typically thought of as being connected with immigrants or any comparable groups. The obvious example here is punk, which is generally held to be a Western style of music. But we have observed that its development in the UK was informed by the migrant form of reggae, and this suggests that the form may have some immigrant aspects. However, this is true of any form of popular music that has developed in the West, from the blues that derived from black former slaves in America to the country and Western that has its roots in the nineteenth century melting pot of the Appalachians.

But punk is not an immigrant music merely on account of its reggae inflections, or because its underlying form comes from rock'n'roll, which is in turn based on blues. With punk, it is not the music itself that makes it an immigrant

music, but the accompanying style and attitude, which was in fact as important, if not more so, than the music. As Dick Hebdige has stated in his examination of punk as an archetypal subculture, punk presents a resistance towards mainstream culture.⁷⁶ Punks dressed in a style that was designed to deliberately provoke controversy, and the most successful punk band of all, The Sex Pistols, called for anarchy and criticised the establishment and the monarchy in their work. Although it is in some ways supplementary to the style, the music also functioned as a kind of resistance, with its unsophisticated playing and anti-aesthetic acting as a deliberate antithesis to mainstream popular music. This meant that punks came to occupy the same marginalised position as immigrants: the crucial difference between the two is that punks chose to become marginalised, whereas immigrants have not had that choice. Nonetheless, punks and immigrants have this basic fact of marginalisation in common, and this makes punk an attractive form for migrants to adopt and adapt.

An early example of migrant identities being incorporated into punk is Patti Smith's song 'Rock N Roll Nigger', from her 1978 album *Easter*. In this song, she declares herself to be the titular 'nigger' of rock 'n' roll, stating that, 'Outside of society is where I want to be'. Here, Smith is presenting herself as a migrant who does not want to assimilate – this is comparable with Gogol Bordello's 'Avenue B'. Although her controversial use of the word 'nigger' is not entirely successful, its intent is clear: this is an attempt to portray punk as a counterpart to rock 'n' roll that is seen as an outsider. Richard Hell made a very similar attempt when he said in an interview that 'Punks are niggers'⁷⁷. Punk is in a way the immigrant of popular music, something that is not quite part of mainstream Western culture. On its first appearance in the West, it existed in its own distinct communities, but in the intervening years it has gradually become assimilated, and has mixed with other forms of music and other cultures. Gypsy Punk is an obvious example of this, but in terms of immigrant discourses, it is a more interesting combination than many of punk's other fusions. This is because the 'gypsy' has the negative and derogatory connotations comparable with the 'nigger' that punk has been characterised as, but also an accompanying sense of the exotic and appealing.

⁷⁶ See Dick Hebdige: *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

⁷⁷ Cited in Hebdige, p.62.

The 'gypsy' is therefore a figure particularly well suited for use as a device in immigrant music, and Gogol Bordello is an appropriate band through whom to consider immigrant music. In the postmodern era that Gogol Bordello censures, global movement has broadened and accelerated. With Gypsy Punk, Gogol Bordello rise to the artistic challenges posed by postmodernity to produce a form of immigrant music that reflects the contemporary global experience. By selecting extensively mythologised figures – the 'gypsy' and the immigrant – and locations – The Balkans and the Lower East Side – which are imbued with mythologised histories bound closely to those figures, they produce in Gypsy Punk a tightly tied knot of time, space and humanity that grows ever tighter as they layer more and more myths within their oeuvre.

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